Harriet Martineau

"The Crofton Boys"

Chapter One.

All the Proctors but Phil.

Mr Proctor, the chemist and druggist, kept his shop, and lived in the Strand, London. His children thought that there was never anything pleasanter than the way they lived. Their house was warm in winter, and such a little distance from the church, that they had no difficulty in getting to church and back again, in the worst weather, before their shoes were wet. They were also conveniently near to Covent Garden market; so that, if any friend dropped in to dinner unexpectedly, Jane and Agnes could be off to the market, and buy a fowl, or some vegetables or fruit, and be back again before they were missed. It was not even too far for little Harry to trot with one of his sisters, early on a summer's morning, to spend his penny (when he happened to have one) on a bunch of flowers, to lay on papa's plate, to surprise him when he came in to breakfast. Not much farther off was the Temple Garden, where Mrs Proctor took her children every fine summer evening to walk and breathe the air from the river; and when Mr Proctor could find time to come to them for a turn or two before the younger ones must go home to bed, it seemed to the whole party the happiest and most beautiful place in the whole world,—except one. They had once been to Broadstairs, when the children were in poor health after the measles: and for ever after, when they thought of the waves beating on the shore, and of the pleasures of growing strong and well among the sea-breezes, they felt that there might be places more delightful than the Temple Garden: but they were still very proud and fond of the grass and trees, and the gravel walks, and the view over the Thames, and were pleased to show off the garden to all friends from the country who came to visit them.

The greatest privilege of all, however, was that they could see the river without going out of their own house. There were three back windows to the house, one above another; and from the two uppermost of these windows there was what the children called a view of the Thames. There was a gap of a few yards

wide between two high brick houses: and through this gap might be seen the broad river, with vessels of every kind passing up or down. Outside the second window were some leads, affording space for three or four chairs: and here it was that Jane and Agnes liked to sit at work, on certain hours of fine days. There were times when these leads were too hot, the heat of the sun being reflected from the surrounding brick walls; but at an earlier hour before the shadows were gone, and when the air blew in from the river, the place was cool, and the little girls delighted to carry their stools to the leads, and do their sewing there. There Philip would condescend to spend a part of his mornings, in his Midsummer holidays, frightening his sisters with climbing about in dangerous places, or amusing them with stories of school pranks, or raising his younger brother Hugh's envy of the boys who were so happy as to be old enough to go to school at Mr Tooke's, at Crofton.

The girls had no peace from their brothers climbing about in dangerous places. Hugh was, if possible, worse than Philip for this. He imitated all Philip's feats, and had some of his own besides. In answer to Jane's lectures and the entreaties of Agnes, Hugh always declared that he had a right to do such things, as he meant to be a soldier or a sailor; and how should he be able to climb the mast of a ship, or the walls of a city, if he did not begin to practise now? Agnes was almost sorry they had been to Broadstairs, and could see ships in the Thames, when she considered that, if Hugh had not seen so much of the world, he might have been satisfied to be apprenticed to his father, when old enough, and to have lived at home happily with his family. Jane advised Agnes not to argue with Hugh, and then perhaps his wish to rove about the world might go off. She had heard her father say that, when he was a boy, and used to bring home news of victories, and help to put up candles at the windows on illumination nights, he had a great fancy for being a soldier; but that it was his fortune to see some soldiers from Spain, and hear from them what war really was, just when peace came, and when there was no more glory to be got; so that he had happily settled down to be a London shop-keeper—a lot which he would not exchange with that of any man living. Hugh was very like papa, Jane added; and the same change might take place in his mind, if he was not made perverse by argument. So Agnes only sighed, and bent her head closer over her work, as she heard Hugh talk of the adventures he meant to have when he should be old enough to get away from Old England.

There was one person that laughed at Hugh for this fancy of his;—Miss Harold, the daily governess, who came to keep school for three hours every morning. When Hugh forgot his lesson, and sat staring at the upper panes of the window, in a reverie about his future travels; or when he was found to have been drawing a soldier on his slate instead of doing his sum, Miss Harold reminded him what a pretty figure a soldier would cut who knew no geography, or a sailor who could not make his reckonings, for want of attending early to his arithmetic Hugh could not deny this; but he was always wishing that school-hours were over, that he might get under the great dining table to read Robinson Crusoe, or might play at shipwreck, under pretence of amusing little Harry. It did make him ashamed to see how his sisters got on, from the mere pleasure of learning, and without any idea of ever living anywhere but in London; while he, who seemed to have so much more reason for wanting the very knowledge that they were obtaining, could not settle his mind to his lessons. Jane was beginning to read French books for her amusement in leisure hours; and Agnes was often found to have covered two slates with sums in Practice, just for pleasure, while he could not master the very moderate lessons Miss Harold set him. It is true, he was two years younger than Agnes: but she had known more of everything that he had learned, at seven years old, than he now did at eight. Hugh began to feel very unhappy. He saw that Miss Harold was dissatisfied, and was pretty sure that she had spoken to his mother about him. He felt that his mother became more strict in making him sit down beside her, in the afternoon, to learn his lessons for the next day; and he was pretty sure that Agnes went out of the room because she could not help crying when his sum was found to be all wrong, or when he mistook his tenses, or when he said (as he did every day, though regularly warned to mind what he was about) that four times seven is fifty-six. Every day these things weighed more on Hugh’s spirits; every day he felt more and more like a dunce; and when Philip came home for the Midsummer holidays, and told all manner of stories about all sorts of boys at school, without describing anything like Hugh’s troubles with Miss Harold, Hugh was seized with a longing to go to Crofton at once, as he was certainly too young to go at present into the way of a shipwreck or a battle. The worst of it was, there was no prospect of his going yet to Crofton. In Mr Tooke’s large school there was not one boy younger than ten; and Philip believed that Mr Tooke did not like to take little boys. Hugh was aware that his father and mother meant to send him to school with Philip by-and-by; but the idea of having to wait—to do his

lessons with Miss Harold every day till he should be ten years old, made him roll himself on the parlour carpet in despair.

Philip was between eleven and twelve. He was happy at school: and he liked to talk all about it at home. These holidays, Hugh made a better listener than even his sisters; and he was a more amusing one—he knew so little about the country. He asked every question that could be imagined about the playground at the Crofton school, and the boys' doings out of school; and then, when Philip fancied he must know all about what was done, out came some odd remark which showed what wrong notions he had formed of a country life. Hugh had not learned half that he wanted to know, and his little head was full of wonder and mysterious notions, when the holidays came to an end, and Philip had to go away. From that day Hugh was heard to talk less of Spain, and the sea, and desert islands, and more of the Crofton boys; and his play with little Harry was all of being at school. At his lessons, meantime, he did not improve at all.

One very warm day, at the end of August, five weeks after Philip had returned to school, Miss Harold had stayed full ten minutes after twelve o'clock to hear Hugh say one line of the multiplication-table over and over again, to cure him of saying that four times seven is fifty-six; but all in vain: and Mrs Proctor had pegged her not to spend any more time to-day upon it.

Miss Harold went away, the girls took their sewing, and sat down at their mother's work-table, while Hugh was placed before her, with his hands behind his back, and desired to look his mother full in the face, to begin again with "four times one is four," and go through the line, taking care what he was about. He did so; but before he came to four times seven, he sighed, fidgetted, looked up at the corners of the room, off into the work-basket, out into the street, and always, as if by a spell, finished with "four times seven is fifty-six." Jane looked up amazed—Agnes looked down ashamed; his mother looked with severity in his face. He began the line a fourth time, when, at the third figure, he started as if he had been shot. It was only a knock at the door that he had heard; a treble knock, which startled nobody else, though, from the parlour-door being open, it sounded pretty loud.

Mrs Proctor spread a handkerchief over the stockings in her work-basket; Jane put back a stray curl which had fallen over her face; Agnes lifted up her head with a sigh, as if relieved that the multiplication-table must stop for this time; and Hugh gazed into the passage, through the open door, when he heard a

man’s step there. The maid announced Mr Tooke, of Crofton; and Mr Tooke walked in.

Mrs Proctor had actually to push Hugh to one side,—so directly did he stand in the way between her and her visitor. He stood, with his hands still behind his back, gazing up at Mr Tooke, with his face hotter than the multiplication-table had ever made it, and his eyes staring quite as earnestly as they had ever done to find Robinson Crusoe’s island in the map.

“Go, child,” said Mrs Proctor: but this was not enough. Mr Tooke himself had to pass him under his left arm before he could shake hands with Mrs Proctor. Hugh was now covered with shame at this hint that he was in the way; but yet he did not leave the room. He stole to the window, and flung himself down on two chairs, as if looking into the street from behind the blind; but he saw nothing that passed out of doors, so eager was his hope of hearing something of the Crofton boys,—their trap-ball, and their Saturday walk with the usher. Not a word of this kind did he hear. As soon as Mr Tooke had agreed to stay to dinner, his sisters were desired to carry their work elsewhere,—to the leads, if they liked; and he was told that he might go to play. He had hoped he might be overlooked in the window; and unwillingly did he put down first one leg and then the other from the chairs, and saunter out of the room. He did not choose to go near his sisters, to be told how stupidly he had stood in the gentleman’s way; so, when he saw that they were placing their stools on the leads, he went up into the attic, and then down into the kitchen, to see where little Harry was, to play at schoolboys in the back yard.

The maid Susan was not sorry that Harry was taken off her hands; for she wished to rub up her spoons, and fill her castors afresh, for the sake of the visitor who had come in. The thoughtful Jane soon came down with the keys to get out a clean tablecloth, and order a dish of cutlets, in addition to the dinner, and consult with Susan about some dessert; so that, as the little boys looked up from their play, they saw Agnes sitting alone at work upon the leads.

They had played some time, Hugh acting a naughty boy who could not say his Latin lesson to the usher, and little Harry punishing him with far more words than a real usher uses on such an occasion, when they heard Agnes calling them from above their heads. She was leaning over from the leads, begging Hugh to come up to her,—that very moment. Harry must be left below, as the leads were a forbidden place for him. So Harry went to Jane, to see her dish up greengage plums

which he must not touch: and Hugh ran up the stairs. As he passed through the passage, his mother called him. Full of some kind of hope (he did not himself know what), he entered the parlour, and saw Mr Tooke's eyes fixed on him. But his mother only wanted him to shut the door as he passed; that was all. It had stood open, as it usually did on warm days. Could his mother wish it shut on account of anything she was saying? It was possible.

"O Hugh!" exclaimed Agnes, as soon as he set foot on the leads. "What do you think?—But is the parlour-door shut? Who shut it?"

"Mother bade me shut it, as I passed."

"O dear!" said Agnes, in a tone of disappointment; "then she did not mean us to hear what they were talking about."

"What was it? Anything about the Crofton boys? Anything about Phil?"

"I cannot tell you a word about it. Mamma did not know I heard them. How plain anyone can hear what they say in that parlour, Hugh, when the door is open! What do you think I heard mamma tell Mrs Bicknor, last week, when I was jumping Harry off the third stair?"

"Never mind that. Tell me what they are talking about now. Do, Agnes."

Agnes shook her head.

"Now do, dear."

It was hard for Agnes to refuse Hugh anything, at any time; more still when he called her "dear," which he seldom did; and most of all when he put his arm round her neck, as he did now. But she answered—

"I should like to tell you every word; but I cannot now. Mamma has made you shut the door. She does not wish you to hear it."

"Me! Then will you tell Jane?"

"Yes. I shall tell Jane, when we are with mamma at work."

"That is too bad!" exclaimed Hugh, flinging himself down on the leads so vehemently that his sister was afraid he would roll over

into the yard. “What does Jane care about Crofton and the boys to what I do?”

“There is one boy there that Jane cares about more than you do, or I, or anybody, except papa and mamma. Jane loves Phil.”

“O, then, what they are saying in the parlour is about Phil.”

“I did not say that.”

“You pretend you love me as Jane loves Phil! And now you are going to tell her what you won’t tell me! Agnes, I will tell you everything I know all my whole life, if you will just whisper this now. Only just whisper.—Or, I will tell you what. I will guess and guess; and you can nod or shake your head. That won’t be telling.”

“For shame, Hugh! Phil would laugh at you for being a girl if you are so curious. What mamma told Mrs Bicknor was that Jane was her right-hand. What do you think that meant exactly?”

“That Jane might give you a good slap when you are so provoking,” said Hugh, rolling over and over, till his clothes were covered with dust, and Agnes really thought once that he was fairly going over the edge into the yard.

“There is something that I can tell you, Hugh; something that I want to tell you, and nobody else,” said Agnes, glad to see him stop rolling about, and raise himself on his dusty elbow to look at her.

“Well, come, what is it?”

“You must promise beforehand not to be angry.”

“Angry! When am I angry, pray? Come, tell me.”

“You must—you really must—I have a particular reason for saying so—you must learn how much four times seven is. Now, remember, you promised not to be angry.”

Hugh carried off his anger by balancing himself on his head, as if he meant to send his heels over, but that there was no room. From upside downs his voice was heard saying that he knew that as well as Agnes.

“Well, then, how much is it?”

"Twenty-eight, to be sure. Who does not know that?"

"Then pray do not call it fifty-six any more. Miss Harold—"

"There's the thing," said Hugh. "When Miss Harold is here, I can think of nothing but fifty-six. It seems to sound in my ears, as if somebody spoke it, 'four times seven is fifty-six.'"

"You will make me get it by heart too, if you say it so often," said Agnes. "You had better say 'twenty-eight' over to yourself all day long. You may say it to me as often as you like. I shall not get tired. Come, begin now—'four times seven'—"

"I have had enough of that for to-day—tiresome stuff! Now, I shall go and play with Harry again."

"But wait—just say that line once over, Hugh. I have a reason for wishing it. I have, indeed."

"Mother has been telling Mr Tooke that I cannot say my multiplication-table! Now, that is too bad!" exclaimed Hugh. "And they will make me say it after dinner! What a shame!"

"Why Hugh! You know mamma does not like—you know mamma would not—you know mamma never does anything unkind. You should not say such things, Hugh."

"Ay, there! You cannot say that she has not told Mr Tooke that I say my tables wrong."

"Well—you know you always do say it wrong to her."

"I will go somewhere. I will hide myself. I will run to the market while the cloth is laying. I will get away, and not come back till Mr Tooke is gone. I will never say my multiplication table to him!"

"Never?" said Agnes, with an odd smile and a sigh. "However, do not talk of running away, or hiding yourself. You will not have to say anything to Mr Tooke to-day."

"How do you know?"

"I feel sure you will not. I do not believe Mr Tooke will talk to you, or to any of us. There you go! You will be in the water-butt in a minute, if you tumble so."

"I don't care if I am. Mr Tooke will not come there to hear me say my tables. Let me go!" he cried, struggling, for now Agnes had caught him by the ankle. "If I do tumble in, the water is not up to my chin, and it will be a cool hiding-place this hot day."

"But there is Susan gone to lay the cloth; and you must be brushed; for you are all over dust. Come up, and I will brush you."

Hugh was determined to have a little more dust first. He rolled once more the whole length of the leads, turned over Jane's stool, and upset her work-basket, so that her thimble bounded off to a far corner, and the shirt-collar she was stitching fell over into the water-butt.

"There! What will Jane say?" cried Agnes, picking up the basket, and peeping over into the small part of the top of the water-butt which was not covered.

"There never was anything like boys for mischief," said the maid Susan, who now appeared to pull Hugh in, and make him neat. Susan always found time, between laying the cloth and bringing up dinner, to smooth Hugh's hair, and give a particular lock a particular turn on his forehead with a wet comb.

"Let that alone," said Hugh, as Agnes peeped into the butt after the drowning collar. "I will have the top off this afternoon, and it will make good fishing for Harry and me."

Agnes had to let the matter alone; for Hugh was so dusty that she had to brush one side of him while Susan did the other. Susan gave him some hard knocks while she assured him that he was not going to have Harry up on the leads to learn his tricks, or to be drowned. She hardly knew which of the two would be the worst for Harry. It was lucky for Hugh that Susan was wanted below directly, for she scolded him the whole time she was parting and smoothing his hair. When it was done, however, and the wet lock on his forehead took the right turn at once, she gave him a kiss in the very middle of it, and said she knew he would be a good boy before the gentleman from the country.

Hugh would not go in with Agnes, because he knew Mr Tooke would shake hands with her, and take notice of anyone who was with her. He waited in the passage till Susan carried in the fish, when he entered behind her, and slipped to the window till the party took their seats, when he hoped Mr Tooke would not observe who sat between Agnes and his father. But the very

first thing his father did was to pull his head back by the hair behind, and ask him whether he had persuaded Mr Tooke to tell him all about the Crofton boys.

Hugh did not wish to make any answer; but his father said "Eh?" and he thought he must speak; so he said that Phil had told him all he wanted to know about the Crofton boys.

"Then you can get Mr Tooke to tell you about Phil, if you want nothing else," said Mr Proctor.

Mr Tooke nodded and smiled; but Hugh began to hand plates with all his might, he was so afraid that the next thing would be a question how much four times seven was.

The dinner went on, however; and the fish was eaten, and the meat, and the pudding; and the dessert was on the table, without any one having even alluded to the multiplication-table. Before this time, Hugh had become quite at his ease, and had looked at Mr Tooke till he knew his face quite well.

Soon after dinner Mr Proctor was called away upon business; and Hugh slipped into his father's arm-chair, and crossed one leg over the other knee, as he leaned back at his leisure, listening to Mr Tooke's conversation with his mother about the sort of education that he considered most fit for some boys from India, who had only a certain time to devote to school-learning. In the course of this conversation some curious things dropped about the curiosity of children from India about some things very common here;—their wonder at snow and ice, their delight at being able to slide in the winter, and their curiosity about the harvest and gleaning, now approaching. Mr Proctor came back just as Mr Tooke was telling of the annual holiday of the boys at harvest-time, when they gleaned for the poor of the village. As Hugh had never seen a corn-field, he had no very clear idea of harvest and gleaning; and he wanted to hear all he could. When obliged to turn out of the arm-chair, he drew a stool between his mother and Mr Tooke: and presently he was leaning on his arms on the table, with his face close to Mr Tooke's, as if swallowing the gentleman's words as they fell. This was inconvenient; and his mother made him draw back his stool a good way. Though he could hear very well, Hugh did not like this, and he slipped off his stool, and came closer and closer.

"And did you say," asked Mr Proctor, "that your youngest pupil is nine?"

“Just nine;—the age of my own boy. I could have wished to have none under ten, for the reason you know of. But—”

“I wish,” cried Hugh, thrusting himself in so that Mr Tooke saw the boy had a mind to sit on his knee,—“I wish you would take boys at eight and a quarter.”

“That is your age,” said Mr Tooke, smiling and making room between his knees.

“How did you know? Mother told you.”

“No; indeed she did not,—not exactly. My boy was eight and a quarter not very long ago; and he—”

“Did he like being in your school?”

“He always seemed very happy there, though he was so much the youngest. And they teased him sometimes for being the youngest. Now you know, if you came, you would be the youngest, and they might tease you for it.”

“I don’t think I should mind that. What sort of teasing, though?”

“Trying whether he was afraid of things.”

“What sort of things?”

“Being on the top of a wall, or up in a tree. And then they sent him errands when he was tired, or when he wanted to be doing something else. They tried too whether he could bear some rough things without telling.”

“And did he?”

“Yes, generally. On the whole, very well. I see they think him a brave boy now.”

“I think I could. But do not you really take boys as young as I am?”

“Such is really my rule.”

It was very provoking, but Hugh was here called away to fish up Jane’s work out of the water-butt. As he had put it in, he was the proper person to get it out. He thought he should have liked the fun of it; but now he was in a great hurry back, to hear Mr Tooke talk. It really seemed as if the shirt-collar was alive, it

always slipped away so when he thought he had it. Jane kept him to the job till he brought up her work, dripping and soiled. By that time tea was ready,—an early tea, because Mr Tooke had to go away. Whatever was said at tea was about politics, and about a new black dye which some chemist had discovered; and Mr Tooke went away directly after.

He turned round full upon Hugh, just as he was going. Hugh stepped back, for it flashed upon him that he was now to be asked how much four times seven was. But Mr Tooke only shook hands with him, and bade him grow older as fast as he could.

Chapter Two.

Why Mr Tooke came.

After tea the young people had to learn their lessons for the next day. They always tried to get these done, and the books put away, before Mr Proctor came in on his shop being shut, and the business of the day being finished. He liked to find his children at liberty for a little play, or half an hour of pleasant reading; or, in the winter evenings, for a dance to the music of his violin. Little Harry had been known to be kept up far too late, that he might hear the violin, and that his papa might enjoy the fun of seeing him run about among the rest, putting them all out, and fancying he was dancing. All believed there would be time for play with papa to-night, tea had been so much earlier than usual. But Agnes soon feared there would be no play for Hugh. Though Jane pored over her German, twisting her forefinger in the particular curl which she always twisted when she was deep in her lessons; though Agnes rocked herself on her chair, as she always did when she was learning by heart; and though Mrs Proctor kept Harry quiet at the other end of the room with telling him long stories, in a very low voice, about the elephant and Brighton pier, in the picture-book, Hugh could not learn his capital cities. He even spoke out twice, and stopped himself when he saw all the heads in the room raised in surprise. Then he set himself to work again, and he said "Copenhagen" so often over that he was not likely to forget the word; but what country it belonged to he could not fix in his mind, though Agnes wrote it down large on the slate, in hopes that the sight of the letters would help him to remember. Before he had got on to "Constantinople," the well-known sound was heard of the shop-boy taking the shop-shutters out of their day-

place, and Mr Proctor would certainly be coming presently. Jane closed her dictionary, and shook back her curls from over her eyes; Mrs Proctor put down Harry from her lap, and let him call for papa as loud as he would; and papa came bustling in, and gave Harry a long toss, and several topplings over his shoulder, and yet Hugh was not ready.

"Come, children," said Mr Proctor to Agnes and Hugh, "we have all done enough for to-day. Away with books and slates!"

"But, papa," said Agnes, "Hugh has not quite done. If he might have just five minutes more, Miss Harold—"

"Never mind what Miss Harold says! That is, you girls must; but between this and Michaelmas—"

He stopped short, and the girls saw that it was a sign from their mother that made him do so. He immediately proceeded to make so much noise with Harry, that Hugh discovered nothing more than that he might put away his books, and not mind Miss Harold this time. If she asked him to-morrow why he had not got down to "Constantinople," he could tell her exactly what his father had said. So merry was Hugh's play this evening. He stood so perfectly upright on his father's shoulders, that he could reach the top of his grandmamma's picture, and show by his finger-ends how thick the dust lay upon the frame: and neither he nor his father minded being told that he was far too old for such play.

In the midst of the fun, Hugh had a misgiving, more than once, of his mother having something severe to say to him when she should come up to his room, to hear him say his prayer, and to look back a little with him upon the events of the day. Besides his consciousness that he had done nothing well this day, there were grave looks from his mother which made him think that she was not pleased with him. When he was undressing, therefore, he listened with some anxiety for her footsteps, and, when she appeared, he was ready with his confession of idleness. She stopped him in the beginning, saying that she had rather not hear any more such confessions. She had listened to too many, and had allowed him to spend in confessions some of the strength which should have been applied to mending his faults. For the present, while she was preparing a way to help him to conquer his inattention, she advised him to say nothing to her, or to any one else, on the subject; but this need not prevent him from praying to God to give him strength to overcome his great fault.

“Oh, mother! Mother!” cried Hugh, in an agony, “you give me up! What shall I do if you will not help me any more?”

His mother smiled, and told him he need not fear any such thing. It would be very cruel to leave off providing him with food and clothes, because it gave trouble to do so; and it would be far more cruel to abandon him to his faults, for such a reason. She would never cease to help him till they were cured: but, as all means yet tried had failed, she must plan some others; and meantime she did not wish him to become hardened to his faults, by talking about them every night, when there was no amendment during the day.

Though she spoke very kindly, and kissed him before she went away, Hugh felt that he was punished. He felt more unhappy than if his mother had told him all she thought of his idleness. Though his mother had told him to go to sleep, and blessed him, he could not help crying a little, and wishing that he was a Crofton boy. He supposed the Crofton boys all got their lessons done somehow, as a matter of course; and then they could go to sleep without any uncomfortable feelings or any tears.

In the morning all these thoughts were gone. He had something else to think about; for he had to play with Harry, and take care of him, while Susan swept and dusted the parlour: and Harry was bent upon going into the shop—a place where, according to the rule of the house, no child of the family was ever to set foot till it was old enough to be trusted; nor to taste anything there, asked or unasked. There were some poisonous things in the shop, and some few nice syrups and gums; and no child could be safe and well there who could not let alone whatever might be left on the counter, or refuse any nice taste that a good-natured shopman might offer. Harry was, as yet, far too young; but, as often as the cook washed the floor-cloth in the passage, so that the inner shop-door had to be opened, Master Harry was seized with an unconquerable desire to go and see the blue and red glass bowls which he was permitted to admire from the street, as he went out and came in from his walks. Mr Proctor came down this morning as Hugh was catching Harry in the passage. He snatched up his boys, packed one under each arm, and ran with them into the yard, where he rolled Harry up in a new mat, which the cook was going to lay at the house-door.

“There!” said he. “Keep him fast, Hugh, till the passage-door is shut. What shall we do with the rogue when you are at Crofton, I wonder?”

“Why, papa! He will be big enough to take care of himself by that time.”

“Bless me! I forgot again,” exclaimed Mr Proctor, as he made haste away into the shop.

Before long, Harry was safe under the attraction of his basin of bread and milk; and Hugh fell into a reverie at the breakfast-table, keeping his spoon suspended in his hand as he looked up at the windows, without seeing anything. Jane asked him twice to hand the butter before he heard.

“He is thinking how much four times seven is,” observed Mr Proctor: and Hugh started at the words.

“I tell you what, Hugh,” continued his father; “if the Crofton people do not teach you how much four times seven is when you come within four weeks of next Christmas-day, I shall give you up, and them too, for dunces all.”

All the eyes round the table were fixed on Mr Proctor in an instant.

“There now!” said he, “I have let the cat out of the bag. Look at Agnes!” and he pinched her crimson cheek.

Everybody then looked at Agnes, except Harry, who was busy looking for the cat which papa said had come out of mamma’s work-bag. Agnes could not bear the gaze, and burst into tears.

“Agnes has taken more pains to keep the secret than her papa,” said Mrs Proctor. “The secret is, that Hugh is going to Crofton next month.”

“Am I ten, then?” asked Hugh, in his hurry and surprise.

“Scarcely; since you were only eight and a quarter yesterday afternoon,” replied his father.

“I will tell you all about it by-and-by, my dear,” said his mother. Her glance towards Agnes made all the rest understand that they had better speak of something else now. So Mr Proctor beckoned Harry to come and see whether the cat had not got into the bag again, as she was not to be seen anywhere else. It is true, the bag was not much bigger than a cat’s head; but that did not matter to Harry, who never cared for that sort of consideration, and had been busy for half an hour, the day

before, in trying to put the key of the house-door into the key-hole of the tea-caddy.

By the time Agnes had recovered herself, and the table was cleared, Miss Harold had arrived. Hugh brought his books with the rest, but, instead of opening them, rested his elbow on the uppermost, and stared full at Miss Harold.

"Well, Hugh!" said she, smiling.

"I have not learned quite down to 'Constantinople,'" said he. "Papa told me I need not, and not to mind you."

"Why, Hugh! Hush!" cried Jane.

"He did,—he said exactly that. But he meant, Miss Harold, that I am to be a Crofton boy,—directly, next month."

"Then have we done with one another, Hugh?" asked Miss Harold, gently. "Will you not learn any more from me?"

"That is for your choice, Miss Harold," observed Mrs Proctor. "Hugh has not deserved the pains you have taken with him: and if you decline more trouble with him now he is going into other hands, no one can wonder."

Miss Harold feared that he was but poorly prepared for school, and was quite ready to help him, if he would give his mind to the effort. She thought that play, or reading books that he liked, was less waste of time than his common way of doing his lessons; but if he was disposed really to work, with the expectation of Crofton before him, she was ready to do her best to prepare him for the real hard work he would have to do there. His mother proposed that he should have time to consider whether he would have a month's holiday or a month's work, before leaving home. She had to go out this morning. He might go with her, if he liked; and as they returned, they would sit down in the Temple Garden, and she would tell him all about the plan.

Hugh liked this beginning of his new prospects. He ran to be made neat for his walk with his mother. He knew he must have the wet curl on his forehead twice over to day, but he comforted himself with hoping that there would be no time at Crofton for him to be kept standing, to have his hair done so particularly, and to be scolded all the while, and then kissed, like a baby, at the end.

Chapter Three.

Michaelmas-Day come.

Hugh was about to ask his mother, again and again during their walk, why Mr Tooke let him go to Crofton before he was ten; but Mrs Proctor was grave and silent; and though she spoke kindly to him now and then, she did not seem disposed to talk. At last they were in the Temple Garden; and they sat down where there was no one to overhear them; and then Hugh looked up at his mother. She saw, and told him, what it was that he wanted to ask.

"It is on account of the little boys themselves," said she, "that Mr Tooke does not wish to have them very young, now that there is no kind lady in the house who could be like a mother to them."

"But there is Mrs Watson. Phil has told me a hundred things about Mrs Watson."

"Mrs Watson is the housekeeper. She is careful, I know, about the boys' health and comfort; but she has no time to attend to the younger ones, as Mrs Tooke did,—hearing their little troubles, and being a friend to them like their mothers at home."

"There is Phil—"

"Yes. You will have Phil to look to. But neither Phil, nor any one else, can save you from some troubles you are likely to have from being the youngest."

"Such as Mr Tooke told me his boy had;—being put on the top of a high wall, and plagued when he was tired: and all that. I don't think I should much mind those things."

"So we hope, and so we believe. Your fault is not cowardice—"

Mrs Proctor so seldom praised anybody that her words of esteem went a great way. Hugh first looked up at her, and then down on the grass,—his cheeks glowed so. She went on—

"You have faults,—faults which give your father and me great pain; and though you are not cowardly about being hurt in your

body, you sadly want courage of a better kind,—courage to mend the weakness of your mind. You are so young that we are sorry for you, and mean to send you where the example of other boys may give you the resolution you want so much."

"All the boys learn their lessons at Crofton," observed Hugh.

"Yes; but not by magic. They have to give their minds to their work. You will find it painful and difficult to learn this, after your idle habits at home. I give you warning that you will find it much more difficult than you suppose; and I should not wonder if you wish yourself at home with Miss Harold many times before Christmas."

Mrs Proctor was not unkind in saying this. She saw that Hugh was so delighted about going that nothing would depress his spirits, and that the chief fear was his being disappointed and unhappy when she should be far away. It might then be some consolation to him to remember that she was aware of what he would have to go through. He now smiled, and said he did not think he should ever wish to say his lessons to Miss Harold as long as he lived. Then it quickly passed through his mind that, instead of the leads and the little yard, there would be the playground; and instead of the church bells, the rooks; and instead of Susan, with her washing and combing, and scolding and kissing, there would be plenty of boys to play with. As he thought of these things, he started up, and toppled head over heels on the grass, and then was up by his mother's side again, saying that he did not care about anything that was to happen at Crofton;—he was not afraid,—not even of the usher, though Phil could not bear him.

"If you can bring yourself to learn your lessons well," said his mother, "you need not fear the usher. But remember it depends upon that. You will do well enough in the playground, I have no doubt."

After this, there was only to settle the time that was to pass—the weeks, days, and hours before Michaelmas-day; and whether these weeks and days should be employed in preparing for Crofton under Miss Harold, or whether he should take his chance there unprepared as he was. Mrs Proctor saw that his habits of inattention were so fixed, and his disgust at lessons in the parlour so strong, that she encouraged his doing no lessons in the interval. Hugh would have said beforehand that three weeks' liberty to read voyages and travels, and play with Harry, would have made him perfectly happy; but he felt that there was some disgrace mixed up with his holiday, and that

everybody would look upon him with a sort of pity, instead of wishing him joy; and this spoiled his pleasure a good deal. When he came home from his walk, Agnes thought he looked less happy than when he went out; and she feared his spirits were down about Crofton.

His spirits were up and down many times during the next three weeks. He thought these weeks would never be over. Every day dragged on more slowly than the last; at every meal he was less inclined to eat; and his happiest time was when going to bed, because he was a day nearer Crofton. His mother, foreseeing just what happened, wished to have kept the news from him till within a week of his departure, and had agreed with Mr Proctor that it should be so. But Mr Proctor hated secrets, and, as we see, let it out immediately.

At last, the day came;—a warm, sunny, autumn day, on which any one might have enjoyed the prospect of a drive into the country. The coach was to set off from an inn in Fleet Street, at noon, and would set Hugh down at his uncle's door in time for dinner, the distance being twenty-eight miles. His uncle's house was just two miles from the school. Phil would probably be there to meet his brother, and take him to Crofton in the afternoon.

How to get rid of the hours till noon was the question. Hugh had had everything packed up, over which he had any control, for some days. He had not left himself a plaything of those which he might carry: and it frightened him that his mother did not seem to think of packing his clothes till after breakfast this very morning. When she entered his room for the purpose, he was fidgeting about, saying to himself that he should never be ready. Agnes came with her mother, to help: but before the second shirt was laid in the box, she was in tears and had to go away; for every one in the house was in the habit of hiding tears from Mrs Proctor, who rarely shed them herself, and was known to think that they might generally be suppressed, and should be so.

As Hugh stood beside her, handing stockings and handkerchiefs, to fill up the corners of the box, she spoke as she might not have done if they had not been alone. She said but a few words; but Hugh never forgot them.

"You know, my dear," said she, "that I do not approve of dwelling upon troubles. You know I never encourage my children to fret about what cannot be helped."

There was nothing in the world that Hugh was more certain of than this.

“And yet I tell you,” she continued, “that you will not be nearly so happy at Crofton as you expect—at least, at first. It grieves me to see you so full of expectation—”

“Does it indeed, mother?”

“It does indeed. But my comfort is—”

“You think I can bear it,” cried Hugh, holding up his head. “You think I can bear anything.”

“I think you are a brave boy, on the whole. But that is not the comfort I was speaking of; for there is a world of troubles too heavy for the bravery of a thoughtless child, like you. My comfort is, my dear, that you know where to go for strength when your heart fails you. You will be away from your father and me; but a far wiser and kinder parent will be always with you. If I were not sure that you would continually open your heart to Him, I could not let you go from me.”

“I will—I always do,” said Hugh, in a low voice. “Then remember this, my boy. If you have that help, *you must not fail*. Knowing that you have that help, I expect of you that you do your own duty, and bear your own troubles, like a man. If you were to be all alone in the new world you are going to, you would be but a helpless child: but remember, when a child makes God his friend, God puts into the youngest and weakest the spirit of a man.”

“You will ask Him too, mother;—you will pray Him to make me brave, and—and—”

“And what else?” she inquired, fixing her eyes upon him.

“And steady,” replied Hugh, casting down his eyes; “for that is what I want most of all.”

“It is,” replied his mother. “I do, and always will, pray for you.”

Not another word was said till they went down into the parlour. Though it was only eleven o’clock, Miss Harold was putting on her bonnet to go away: and there was a plate of bread and cheese on the table.

“Lunch!” said Hugh, turning away with disgust. “Do eat it,” said Agnes, who had brought it. “You had no breakfast, you know.”

“Because I did not want it; and I can’t eat anything now.”

Jane made a sign to Agnes to take the plate out of sight: and she put some biscuits into a paper bag, that he might eat on the road, if he should become hungry.

Neither Miss Harold nor Hugh could possibly feel any grief at parting; for they had had little satisfaction together; but she said very kindly that she should hope to hear often of him, and wished he might be happy as a Crofton boy. Hugh could hardly answer her;—so amazed was he to find that his sisters were giving up an hour of their lessons on his account,—that they might go with him to the coach!—And then Susan came in, about the cord for his box, and her eyes were red:—and, at the sight of her, Agnes began to cry again; and Jane bent down her head over the glove she was mending for him, and her needle stopped.

“Jane,” said her mother, gravely, “if you are not mending that glove, give it to me. It is getting late.”

Jane brushed her hand across her eyes, and stitched away again. Then she threw the gloves to Hugh without looking at him, and ran to get ready to go to the coach.

The bustle of the inn-yard would not do for little Harry. He could not go. Hugh was extremely surprised to find that all the rest were going;—that even his father was smoothing his hat in the passage for the walk,—really leaving the shop at noon on his account! The porter was at his service too,—waiting for his box! It was very odd to feel of such consequence.

Hugh ran down to bid the maids good-bye. The cook had cut a sandwich, which she thrust into his pocket, though he told her he had some biscuits. Susan cried so that little Harry stood grave and wondering. Susan sobbed out that she knew he did not care a bit about leaving home and everybody. Hugh wished she would not say so, though he felt it was true, and wondered at it himself. Mr Proctor heard Susan’s lamentations, and called to her from the passage above not to make herself unhappy about that; for the time would soon come when Hugh would be homesick enough.

Mr Blake, the shopman, came to the shop-door as they passed, and bowed and smiled; and the boy put himself in the way, with a broad grin: and then the party walked on quickly.

The sun seemed to Hugh to glare very much; and he thought he had never known the streets so noisy, or the people so pushing. The truth was, his heart was beating so he could scarcely see: and yet he was so busy looking about him for a sight of the river, and everything he wished to bid good-bye to, that his father, who held him fast by the hand, shook him more than once, and told him he would run everybody down if he could,—to judge by his way of walking. He must learn to march better, if he was to be a soldier; and to steer, if he was to be a sailor.

There were just two minutes to spare when they reached the inn-yard. The horses were pawing and fidgeting, and some of the passengers had mounted: so Mr Proctor said he would seat the boy at once. He spoke to two men who were on the roof, just behind the coachman; and they agreed to let Hugh sit between them, on the assurance that the driver would look to his concerns, and see that he was set down at the right place.

"Now, my boy, up with you!" said his father, as he turned from speaking to these men. Hugh was so eager, that he put up his foot to mount, without remembering to bid his mother and sisters good-bye. Mr Proctor laughed at this; and nobody wondered; but Agnes cried bitterly; and she could not forget it, from that time till she saw her brother again. When they had all kissed him, and his mother's earnest look had bidden him remember what had passed between them that morning, he was lifted up by his father, and received by the two men, between whom he found a safe seat.

Then he wished they were off. It was uncomfortable to see his sisters crying there, and not to be able to cry too, or to speak to them. When the coachman was drawing on his second glove, and the ostlers held each a hand to pull off the horse-cloths, and the last moment was come, Mr Proctor swung himself up by the step, to say one thing more. It was—

"I say, Hugh,—can you tell me,—how much is four times seven?"

Mrs Proctor pulled her husband's coat-tail, and he leaped down, the horses' feet scrambled, their heads issued from the gateway of the inn-yard, and Hugh's family were left behind. In the midst of the noise, the man on Hugh's right-hand said to the one on his left,—

“There is some joke in that last remark, I imagine.”

The other man nodded; and then there was no more speaking till they were off the stones. When the clatter was over, and the coach began to roll along the smooth road, Hugh’s neighbour repeated,—

“There was some joke, I fancy, in that last remark of your father’s.”

“Yes,” said Hugh.

“Are you in the habit of saying the multiplication-table when you travel?” said the other. “If so, we shall be happy to hear it.”

“Exceedingly happy,” observed the first.

“I never say it when I can help it,” said Hugh; “and I see no occasion now.”

The men laughed, and then asked him if he was going far.

“To Crofton. I am going to be a Crofton boy,” said Hugh.

“A what? Where is he going?” his companions asked one another over his head. They were no wiser when Hugh repeated what he had said; nor could the coachman enlighten them. He only knew that he was to put the boy down at Shaw’s, the great miller’s, near thirty miles along the road.

“Eight-and-twenty,” said Hugh, in correction; “and Crofton is two miles from my uncle’s.”

“Eight-and-twenty. The father’s joke lies there,” observed the right-hand man.

“No, it does not,” said Hugh. He thought he was among a set of very odd people,—none of them knowing what a Crofton boy was. A passenger who sat beside the coachman only smiled when he was appealed to; so it might be concluded that he was ignorant too; and the right and left-hand men seemed so anxious for information, that Hugh told them all he knew;—about the orchard and the avenue, and the pond on the heath, and the playground; and Mrs Watson, and the usher, and Phil, and Joe Cape, and Tony Nelson, and several others of the boys.

One of the men asked him if he was sure he was going for the first time,—he seemed so thoroughly informed of everything

about Crofton. Hugh replied that it was a good thing to have an elder brother like Phil. Phil had told him just what to take to Crofton, and how to take care of his money, and everything.

"Ay! And how do the Crofton boys take care of their money?"

Hugh showed a curious little inner pocket in his jacket, which nobody would dream of that did not know. His mother had let him have such a pocket in both his jackets; and he had wanted to have all his money in this one now, to show how safely he could carry it. But his mother had chosen to pack up all his five shillings in his box,—that square box, with the new brass lock, on the top of all the luggage. In his pocket there was only sixpence now,—the sixpence he was to give the coachman when he was set down.

Then he went on to explain that this sixpence was not out of his own money, but given him by his father, expressly for the coachman. Then his right-hand companion congratulated him upon his spirits, and began to punch and tickle him; and when Hugh writhed himself about, because he could not bear tickling, the coachman said he would have no such doings, and bade them be quiet. Then the passengers seemed to forget Hugh, and talked to one another of the harvest in the north, and the hopping in Kent. Hugh listened about the hopping, supposing it might be some new game, as good as leap-frog; though it seemed strange that one farmer should begin hopping on Monday, and that another should fix Thursday; and that both should be so extremely anxious about the weather. But when he found it was some sort of harvest-work, he left off listening, and gave all his attention to the country sights that were about him. He did not grow tired of the gardens, gay with dahlias and hollyhocks, and asters: nor of the orchards, where the ladder against the tree, and the basket under, showed that apple-gathering was going on; nor of the nooks in the fields, where blackberries were ripening; nor of the chequered sunlight and shadow which lay upon the road; nor of the breezy heath where the blue ponds were ruffled; nor of the pleasant grove where the leaves were beginning to show a tinge of yellow and red, here and there among the green. Silently he enjoyed all these things, only awakening from them when there was a stop to change horses.

He was not thinking of time or distance when he saw the coachman glance round at him, and felt that the speed of the horses was slackening. Still he had no idea that this was any concern of his, till he saw something that made him start.

"Why, there's Phil!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet.

"This is Shaw's mill, and there is Shaw; which is all I have to do with," said the coachman, as he pulled up.

Hugh was soon down, with his uncle and Phil, and one of the men from the mill to help. His aunt was at the window too; so that altogether Hugh forgot to thank his companions for his safe seat. He would have forgotten his box, but for the coachman. One thing more he also forgot.

"I say, young master," said the driver, "remember the coachman. Where's your sixpence?"

"Oh, my sixpence!" cried Hugh, throwing down what he held, to feel in his curious inner pocket, which was empty.

"Lest you find a hole in your pocket, here is a sixpence for you," cried the right-hand passenger, tossing him his own sixpence. "Thank you for teaching us the secret of such a curious pocket."

The coachman was impatient, got his money, and drove off, leaving Hugh to make out why he had been tickled, and how his money had changed hands. With a very red face, he declared it was too bad of the man: but the man was out of his hearing, and could never know how angry he was.

"A pretty story this is for our usher to have against you, to begin with," was Phil's consolation. "Every boy will know it before you show yourself; and you will never hear the last of it, I can tell you."

"Your usher!" exclaimed Hugh, bewildered.

"Yes, our usher. That was he on the box, beside coachee. Did not you find out that much in all these eight-and-twenty miles?"

"How should I? He never told me."

Hugh could hardly speak to his uncle and aunt, he was so taken up with trying to remember what he had said, in the usher's hearing, of the usher himself, and everybody at Crofton.

Chapter Four.

Michaelmas-Day over.

Mrs Shaw ordered dinner presently; and while it was being served, she desired Phil to brush his brother's clothes, as they were dusty from his ride. All the while he was brushing (which, he did very roughly), and all the first part of dinner-time, Phil continued to tease Hugh about what he had said on the top of the coach. Mrs Shaw spoke of the imprudence of talking freely before strangers; and Hugh could have told her that he did not need such a lecture at the very time that he found the same thing by his experience. He did wish Phil would stop. If anybody should ask him a question, he could not answer without crying. Then he remembered how his mother expected him to bear things; and he almost wished he was at home with her now, after all his longing to be away. This thought nearly made him cry again; so he tried to dwell on how his mother would expect him to bear things: but neither of them had thought that morning, beside his box, that the first trial would come from Phil. This again made him so nearly cry that his uncle observed his twitching face, and, without noticing him, said that he, for his part, did not want to see little boys wise before they had time to learn; and that the most silent companion he had ever been shut up with in a coach was certainly the least agreeable: and he went on to relate an adventure which has happened to more persons than one. He had found the gentleman in the corner, with the shaggy coat, to be a bear—a tame bear, which had to take the quickest mode of conveyance, in order to be at a distant fair in good time. Mr Shaw spun out his story, so that Hugh quite recovered himself, and laughed as much as anybody at his uncle having formed a bad opinion of Bruin in the early twilight, for his incivility in not bowing to the passenger who left the coach.

After dinner, Phil thought it time to be off to Crofton. He had missed something by coming away at all to-day; and he was not going to run the chance of losing the top of the class by not having time to do his Sallust properly. Mrs Shaw said they must have some of her plums before they went, and a glass of wine; and Mr Shaw ordered the gig, saying he would drive them, and thus no time would be lost, though he hoped Phil would not mind being at the bottom of every class for once to help his brother, seeing how soon a diligent boy might work his way up again. Phil replied that that was not so easy as people might think, when there was one like Joe Cape determined to keep him down, if he could once get him down.

"I hope you will find time to help Hugh up from the bottom, in a class or two," said Mr Shaw. "You will not be too busy about your own affairs to look to his, I suppose."

“Where is the use of my meddling?” said Phil. “He can’t rise for years to come. Besides—”

“Why can’t I rise?” exclaimed Hugh, with glowing cheeks.

“That is right, Hugh,” said his uncle. “Let nobody prophesy for you till you show what you can do.”

“Why, uncle, he is nearly two years younger than any boy in the school; and—”

“And there is little Page above you in algebra. He is about two years younger than you, Phil, if I remember right.”

Hugh could not help clapping his hands at the prospect this held out to him. Phil took the act for triumphing over him, and went on to say, very insultingly, that a little fellow who had been brought up among the girls all his life, and had learned of nobody but Miss Harold, could not be expected to cut any figure among boys. Hugh looked so grieved for a moment, and then suddenly so relieved, that his kind uncle wondered what was in his mind. He took the boy between his knees and asked him.

Hugh loved his uncle already, as if he had always known him. He put his arms round his neck, and whispered in his ear what he was thinking of;—his mother’s saying that God could and would, if He was sought, put the spirit of a man into the feeblest child.

“True!—quite true! I am very glad you know that, my boy. That will help you to learn at Crofton, though it is better than anything they can teach you in their school-room.”

Mrs Shaw and Phil looked curious; but Mr Shaw did not repeat a word of what Hugh had said. He put the boy away from his knees, because he heard the gig coming round.

Mrs Shaw told Hugh that she hoped he would spend some of his Sundays with his uncle and her; and his uncle added that he must come on holidays as well as Sundays,—there was so much to see about the mill.

Phil was amused, and somewhat pleased, to find how exactly Hugh remembered his description of the place and neighbourhood. He recognised the duck-pond under the hedge by the road-side, with the very finest blackberries growing above it, just out of reach. The church he knew, of course, and the row of chestnuts, whose leaves were just beginning to fall;

and the high wall dividing the orchard from the playground. That must have been the wall on which Mr Tooke's little boy used to be placed to frighten him. It did not look so very high as Hugh had fancied it. One thing which he had never seen or heard of was the bell, under its little roof on the ridge of Mr Tooke's great house. Was it to call in the boys to school, or for an alarm? His uncle told him it might serve the one purpose in the day, and the other by night; and that almost every large farm thereabouts had such a bell on the top of the house.

The sun was near its setting when they came in sight of the Crofton house. A long range of windows glittered in the yellow light, and Phil said that the lower row all belonged to the school-room;—that whole row.

In the midst of his explanations Phil stopped, and his manner grew more rough than ever—with a sort of shyness in it too. It was because some of the boys were within hearing, leaning over the pales which separated the playground from the road.

"I say; hollo there!" cried one. "Is that Prater you have got with you?"

"Prater the second," cried another. "He could not have had his name if there had not been Prater the first."

"There! There's a scrape you have got me into already!" muttered Phil.

"Be a man, Phil, and bear your own share," said Mr Shaw; "and no spite, because your words come back to you!"

The talk at the palings still went on, as the gig rolled quietly in the sandy by-road.

"Prater!" poor Hugh exclaimed. "What a name!"

"Yes; that is you," said his uncle. "You know now what your nick-name will be. Every boy has one or another: and yours might have been worse, because you might have done many a worse thing to earn it."

"But the usher, uncle?"

"What of him?"

"He should not have told about me."

"Don't call him 'Prater the third,' however. Bear your own share, as I said to Phil, and don't meddle with another's."

Perhaps Mr Shaw hoped that through one of the boys the usher would get a new nick-name for his ill-nature in telling tales of a little boy, before he was so much as seen by his companions. He certainly put it into their heads, whether they would make use of it or not.

Mr Tooke was out, taking his evening ride; but Mr Shaw would not drive off till he had seen Mrs Watson, and introduced his younger nephew to her, observing to her that he was but a little fellow to come among such a number of rough boys. Mrs Watson smiled kindly at Hugh, and said she was glad he had a brother in the school, to prevent his feeling lonely at first. It would not take many days, she hoped, to make him feel quite at home. Mr Shaw slipped half-a-crown into Hugh's hand, and whispered to him to try to keep it safe in his inner pocket Hugh ran after him to the door, to tell him he had five shillings already—safe in his box: but his uncle would not take back the half-crown. He thought that, in course of time, Hugh would want all the money he had.

Mrs Watson desired Phil to show his brother where he was to sleep, and to help him to put by his clothes. Phil was in a hurry to get to his Sallust; so that he was not sorry when Mrs Watson herself came up to see that the boy's clothes were laid properly in the deep drawer in which Hugh was to keep his things. Phil then slipped away.

"Dear me!" said Mrs Watson, turning over one of Hugh's new collars, "we must have something different from this. These collars tied with a black ribbon are never tidy. They are always over one shoulder or the other."

"My sisters made them; and they worked so hard to get them done!" said Hugh.

"Very well—very right: only it is a pity they are not of a better make. Every Sunday at church, I shall see your collar awry—and every time you go to your aunt's, she will think we do not make you neat. I must see about that. Here are good stockings, however—properly stout. My dear, are these all the shoes you have got?"

"I have a pair on."

"Of course; I don't doubt that. We must have you measured to-morrow for some boots fitter for the country than these. We have no London pavement here."

And so Mrs Watson went on, sometimes approving and sometimes criticising, till Hugh did not know whether to cry or to be angry. After all the pains his mother and sisters had taken about his things, they were to be found fault with in this way!

When his box was emptied, and his drawer filled, Mrs Watson took him into the school-room, where the boys were at supper. Outside the door the buzz seemed prodigious, and Hugh hoped that, in such a bustle, nobody would notice him. Here he was quite mistaken. The moment he entered there was a hush, and all eyes were turned upon him, except his brother's. Phil hardly looked up from his book; but he made room for Hugh between himself and another boy, and drew the great plate of bread within reach. Mrs Watson saw that Hugh had his basin of milk; and he found it a good thing to have something to do while so many eyes were upon him. He felt that he might have cried if he had not had his supper to eat.

The usher sat at the top of the table, reading. Mrs Watson called his attention to Hugh; and Hugh stood up and made his bow. His face was red, as much with anger as timidity, when he recognised in him the passenger who had sat beside the coachman.

"Perhaps, Mr Carnaby," said Mrs Watson, "you will find something for this young gentleman to do, when he has had his supper, while the rest are learning their lessons. To-morrow he will have his own lessons; but to-night—"

"There is always the multiplication-table," replied Mr Carnaby. "The young gentleman is partial to that, I fancy."

Hugh reddened, and applied himself to his bread and milk.

"Never mind a joke," whispered Mrs Watson. "We won't plague you with the multiplication-table the first evening. I will find you a book or something. Meantime, there is a companion for you—I forgot that."

The good lady went down the room, and brought back a boy who seemed to be doing all he could to stop crying. He dashed his hand over his eyes every minute, and could not look anybody in the face. He had finished his supper, and was at a loss what to do next, as he had only arrived that morning, and

did not know anybody at Crofton. His name was Tom Holt, and he was ten years old.

When they had told their names and ages, and where they came from, the boys did not know what to say next; and Hugh wished Phil would stop murmuring over his Sallust and looking in the dictionary every minute; but Mrs Watson did not forget the strangers. She brought them Cook's Voyages out of the library, to amuse themselves with, on condition of their delivering the book to Mr Carnaby at bedtime.

The rest of the evening passed away very pleasantly. Hugh told Holt a great deal about Broadstairs and the South Sea Islands, and confided to him his own hopes of being a sailor, and going round the world; and, if possible, making his way straight through China,—the most difficult country left to travel in, he believed, except some parts of Africa. He did not want to cross the Great Desert, on account of the heat. He knew something of what that was by the leads at home, when the sun was on them. What was the greatest heat Holt had ever felt? Then came the surprise. Holt had last come from his uncle's farm; but he was born in India, and had lived there till eighteen months ago. So, while Hugh had chattered away about the sea at Broadstairs, and the heat on the leads at home, his companion had come fourteen thousand miles over the ocean, and had felt a heat nearly as extreme as that of the Great Desert! Holt was very unassuming too. He talked of the heat of gleaning in his uncle's harvest-fields, and of the kitchen when the harvest-supper was cooking; owning that he remembered he had felt hotter in India. Hugh heaped questions upon him about his native country and the voyage; and Holt liked to be asked: so that the boys were not at all like strangers just met for the first time. They raised their voices in the eagerness of their talk, from a whisper so as to be heard quite across the table, above the hum and buzz of above thirty others, who were learning their lessons half-aloud. At last Hugh was startled by hearing the words "Prater," "Prater the second." He was silent instantly, to Holt's great wonder.

Without raising his eyes from his book, Phil said, so as to be heard as far as the usher,—

"Who prated, of Prater the second? Who is Prater the third?"

There was a laugh which provoked the usher to come and see whereabouts in Sallust such a passage as this was to be found. Not finding any such, he knuckled Phil's head, and pulled his hair, till Hugh cried out—

"O, don't, sir! Don't hurt him so!"

"Do you call that hurting? You will soon find what hurting is, when you become acquainted with our birch. You shall have four times seven with our birch— Let us see,—that is your favourite number, I think."

The usher looked round, and almost everybody laughed.

"You see I have your secret;—four times seven," continued Mr Carnaby. "What do you shake your head for?"

"Because you have not my secret about four times seven."

"Did not I hear your father? Eh?"

"What did you hear my father say? Nobody here knows what he meant? And nobody need know, unless I choose to tell—which I don't.—Please don't teaze Phil about it, sir: for he knows no more about it than you do."

Mr Carnaby said something about the impertinence of little boys, as if they could have secrets, and then declared it high time that the youngsters should go to bed. Hugh delivered Cook's Voyages into his hands, and then bade Phil good-night. He was just going to put his face up to be kissed, but recollected in time that he was to leave off kissing when he went to school. He held out his hand, but Phil seemed not to see it, and only told him to be sure to lie enough on one side, so as to leave him room; and that he was to take the side of the bed next the window. Hugh nodded and went off, with Holt and two more, who slept in the same room.

The two who were not new boys were in bed in a minute; and when they saw Hugh wash his face and hands, they sat up in bed to stare. One of them told him that he had better not do that, as the maid would be coming for the light, and would leave him in the dark, and report of him if he was not in bed. So Hugh made a great splutter, and did not half dry his face, and left the water in the basin;—a thing which they told him was not allowed. He saw that the others had not kneeled down to say their prayers,—a practice which he had never omitted since he could say a prayer, except when he had the measles. He knew the boys were watching him; but he thought of his mother, and how she had taught him to pray at her knee. He hid himself as well as he could with the scanty bed-curtains, and kneeled. He could not attend to the words he said, while feeling that eyes were upon him; and before he had done, the maid came in for

the candle. She waited; but when he got into bed, she told him that he must be quicker to-morrow night, as she had no time to spare waiting for the candle.

Hugh was more tired than he had ever been in his life. This had been the longest day he had ever known. It seemed more like a week than a day. Yet he could not go to sleep. He had forgotten to ask Phil to be sure and wake him in time in the morning: and now he must keep awake till Phil came, to say this. Then, he could not but ask himself whether he liked, and should like, being at school as much as he expected; and when he felt how very unlike home it was, and how rough everybody seemed, and how Phil appeared almost as if he was ashamed of him, instead of helping him, he was so miserable he did not know what to do. He cried bitterly,—cried till his pillow was quite wet, and he was almost choked with his grief; for he tried hard not to let his sobs be heard. After awhile, he felt what he might do. Though he had kneeled he had not really prayed: and if he had, God is never weary of prayers. It was a happy thought to Hugh that his very best friend was with him still, and that he might speak to Him at any time. He spoke now in his heart; and a great comfort it was. He said—

"O God, I am all alone here, where nobody knows me; and everything is very strange and uncomfortable. Please, make people kind to me till I am used to them; and keep up a brave heart in me, if they are not. Help me not to mind little things; but to do my lessons well, that I may get to like being a Crofton boy, as I thought I should. I love them all at home very much,—better than I ever did before. Make them love me, and think of me every day,—particularly Agnes,—that they may be as glad as I shall be when I go home at Christmas."

This was the most of what he had to say; and he dropped asleep with the feeling that God was listening to him.

After a long while, as it seemed to him, though it was only an hour, there was a light and some bustle in the room. It was Phil and two others coming to bed.

"O Phil!" cried Hugh, starting bolt upright and winking with sleep,—"I meant to keep awake, to ask you to be sure and call me in the morning, time enough,—quite time enough, please."

The others laughed; and Phil asked whether he had not seen the bell, as he came; and what it should be for but to ring everybody up in the morning.

"But I might not hear it," pleaded Hugh.

"Not hear it? You'll soon see that."

"Well, but you will see that I really do wake, won't you?"

"The bell will take care of that, I tell you," was all he could get from Phil.

Chapter Five.

Crofton Play.

Hugh found, in the morning, that there was no danger of his not hearing the bell. Its clang clang startled him out of a sound sleep; and he was on his feet on the floor almost before his eyes were open. The boys who were more used to the bell did not make quite so much haste. They yawned a few times, and turned out more slowly; so that Hugh had the great tin wash basin to himself longer than the rest. There was a basin to every three boys; and, early as Hugh began, his companions were impatient long before he had done. At first, they waited, in curiosity to see what he was going to do after washing his face; when he went further, they began to quiz; but when they found that he actually thought of washing his feet, they hooted and groaned at him for a dirty brat.

"Dirty!" cried Hugh, facing them, amazed, "Dirty for washing my feet! Mother says it is a dirty trick not to wash all over every day."

Phil told him that was stuff and nonsense here. There was no room and no time for such home-doings. The boys all washed their heads and feet on Saturdays. He would soon find that he might be glad to get his face and hands done in the mornings.

The other boys in the room were, or pretended to be, so disgusted with the very idea of washing feet in a basin, that they made Hugh rinse and rub out the tin basin several times before they would use it, and then there was a great bustle to get down-stairs at the second bell. Hugh pulled his brother's arm, as Phil was brushing out of the room, and asked, in a whisper, whether there would be time to say his prayers.

"There will be prayers in the school-room. You must be in time for them," said Phil. "You had better come with me."

"Do wait one moment, while I just comb my hair."

Phil fidgeted, and others giggled, while Hugh tried to part his hair, as Susan had taught him. He gave it up, and left it rough, thinking he would come up and do it when there was nobody there to laugh at him.

The school-room looked chilly and dull, as there was no sunshine in it till the afternoon; and still Mr Tooke was not there, as Hugh had hoped he would be. Mrs Watson and the servants came in for prayers, which were well read by the usher; and then everybody went to business:—everybody but Hugh and Holt, who had nothing to do. Class after class came up for repetition; and this repetition seemed to the new boys an accomplishment they should never acquire. They did not think that any practice would enable them to gabble, as everybody seemed able to gabble here. Hugh had witnessed something of it before,—Phil having been wont to run off at home, "Sal, Sol, Ren et Splen," to the end of the passage, for the admiration of his sisters, and so much to little Harry's amusement, that Susan, however busy she might be, came to listen, and then asked him to say it again, that cook might hear what he learned at school. Hugh now thought that none of them gabbled quite so fast as Phil: but he soon found out, by a glance or two of Phil's to one side, that he was trying to astonish the new boys. It is surprising how it lightened Hugh's heart to find that his brother did not quite despise, or feel ashamed of him, as he had begun to think: but that he even took pains to show off. He was sorry too when the usher spoke sharply to Phil, and even rapped his head with the cane, asking him what he spluttered out his nonsense at that rate for. Thus ended Phil's display; and Hugh felt as hot, and as ready to cry, as if it had happened to himself.

Perhaps the usher saw this; for when he called Hugh up, he was very kind. He looked at the Latin grammar he had used with Miss Harold, and saw by the dogs'-ears exactly how far Hugh had gone in it, and asked him only what he could answer very well. Hugh said three declensions, with only one mistake. Then he was shown the part that he was to say to-morrow morning; and Hugh walked away, all the happier for having something to do, like everybody else. He was so little afraid of the usher, that he went back to him to ask where he had better sit.

"Sit! O! I suppose you must have a desk, though you have nothing to put in it. If there is a spare desk, you shall have it: if not, we will find a corner for you somewhere."

Some of the boys whispered that Mrs Watson's footstool, under her apron, would do: but the usher overheard this, and observed that it took some people a good while to know a new boy; and that they might find that a little fellow might be as much of a man as a big one. And the usher called the oldest boy in the school, and asked him to see if there was a desk for little Proctor. There was: and Hugh put into it his two or three school-books, and his slate; and felt that he was now indeed a Crofton boy. Then, the usher was kinder than he had expected; and he had still to see Mr Tooke, of whom he was not afraid at all. So Hugh's spirits rose, and he liked the prospect of breakfast as well as any boy in the school.

There was one more rebuff for him, first, however. He ran up to his room, to finish combing his hair, while the other boys were thronging into the long room to breakfast. He found the housemaids there, making the beds; and they both cried "Out! Out!" and clapped their hands at him, and threatened to tell Mrs Watson of his having broken rules, if he did not go this moment Hugh asked what Mrs Watson would say to his hair, if he went to breakfast with it as it was. One of the maids was good-natured enough to comb it for him, for once: but she said he must carry a comb in his pocket; as the boys were not allowed to go to their rooms, except at stated hours.

At last, Hugh saw Mr Tooke. When the boys entered school at nine o'clock, the master was at his desk. Hugh went up to his end of the room, with a smiling face, while Tom Holt hung back; and he kept beckoning Tom Holt on, having told him there was nothing to be afraid of. But when, at last, Mr Tooke saw him, he made no difference between the two, and seemed to forget having ever seen Hugh. He told them he hoped they would be good boys, and would do credit to Crofton; and then he asked Mr Carnaby to set them something to learn. And this was all they had to do with Mr Tooke for a long while.

This morning in school, from nine till twelve, seemed the longest morning these little boys had ever known. When they remembered that the afternoon would be as long, and every morning and afternoon for three months, their hearts sank. Perhaps, if any one had told them that the time would grow shorter and shorter by use, and at last, when they had plenty to do, almost too short, they would not have believed it, because they could not yet feel it. But what they now found was only

what every boy and girl finds, on beginning school, or entering upon any new way of life.

Mr Carnaby, who was busy with others, found it rather difficult to fill up their time. When Hugh had said some Latin, and helped his companion to learn his first Latin lesson, and both had written a copy, and done a sum, Mr Carnaby could not spare them any more time or thought, and told them they might do what they liked, if they only kept quiet, till school was up. So they made out the ridiculous figures which somebody had carved upon their desks, and the verses, half rubbed out, which were scribbled inside: and then they reckoned, on their slates, how many days there were before the Christmas holidays;—how many school-days, and how many Sundays. And then Hugh began to draw a steamboat in the Thames, as seen from the leads of his father's house; while Holt drew on his slate the ship in which he came over from India. But before they had done, the clock struck twelve, school was up, and there was a general rush into the playground.

Now Hugh was really to see the country. Except that the sun had shone pleasantly into his room in the morning, through waving trees, nothing had yet occurred to make him feel that he was in the country. Now, however, he was in the open air, with trees sprinkled all over the landscape, and green fields stretching away, and the old church tower half-covered with ivy. Hugh screamed with pleasure; and nobody thought it odd, for almost every boy was shouting. Hugh longed to pick up some of the shining brown chestnuts which he had seen yesterday in the road, under the trees; and he was now cantering away to the spot, when Phil ran after him, and roughly stopped him, saying he would get into a fine scrape for the first day, if he went out of bounds.

Hugh had forgotten there were such things as bounds, and was not at all glad to be reminded of them now. He sighed as he begged Phil to show him exactly where he might go and where he might not Phil did so in an impatient way, and then was off to trap-ball, because his party were waiting for him.

The chestnut-trees overhung one corner of the playground, within the paling: and in that corner Hugh found several chestnuts which had burst their sheaths, and lay among the first fallen leaves. He pocketed them with great delight, wondering that nobody had been before him to secure such a treasure. Agnes should have some; and little Harry would find them nice playthings. They looked good to eat too; and he thought he could spare one to taste; so he took out his knife,

cut off the point of a fine swelling chestnut, and tasted a bit of the inside. Just as he was making a face over it, and wondering that it was so nasty, when those which his father roasted in the fire-shovel on Christmas-day were so good, he heard laughter behind him, and found that he was again doing something ridiculous, though he knew not what: and in a moment poor Hugh was as unhappy as ever.

He ran away from the laughing boys, and went quite to the opposite corner of the playground, where a good number of his schoolfellows were playing ball under the orchard-wall. Hugh ran hither and thither, like the rest, trying to catch the ball; but he never could do it; and he was jostled, and thrown down, and another boy fell over him; and he was told that he knew nothing about play, and had better move off.

He did so, with a heavy heart, wondering how he was ever to be like the other boys, if nobody would take him in hand, and teach him to play, or even let him learn. Remembering what his mother expected of him, he tried to sing, to prevent crying, and began to count the pales round the playground, for something to do. This presently brought him to a tree which stood on the very boundary, its trunk serving instead of two or three pales. It was only a twisted old apple-tree; but the more twisted and gnarled it was, the more it looked like a tree that Hugh could climb; and he had always longed to climb a tree. Glancing up, he saw a boy already there, sitting on the fork of two branches, reading.

"Have you a mind to come up?" asked the boy.

"Yes, sir, I should like to try and climb a tree. I never did."

"Well, this is a good one to begin with. I'll lend you a hand; shall I?"

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't call me, 'sir.' I'm only a schoolboy, like you. I am Dan Firth. Call me Firth, as I am the only one of the name here. You are little Proctor, I think—Proctor's brother."

"Yes: but, Firth, I shall pull you down, if I slip."

"Not you: but I'll come down, and so send you up to my seat, which is the safest to begin with. Stand off."

Firth swung himself down, and then, showing Hugh where to plant his feet, and propping him when he wanted it, he soon seated him on the fork, and laughed good-naturedly when Hugh waved his cap over his head, on occasion of being up in a tree. He let him get down and up again several times, till he could do it quite alone, and felt that he might have a seat here whenever it was not occupied by any one else.

While Hugh sat in the branches, venturing to leave hold with one hand, that he might fan his hot face with his cap, Firth stood on the rail of the palings, holding by the tree, and talking to him. Firth told him that this was the only tree the boys were allowed to climb, since Ned Reeve had fallen from the great ash, and hurt his spine. He showed what trees he had himself climbed before that accident; and it made Hugh giddy to think of being within eight feet of the top of the lofty elm in the churchyard, which Firth had thought nothing of mounting.

"Did anybody teach you?" asked Hugh.

"Yes; my father taught me to climb, when I was younger than you."

"And had you anybody to teach you games and things, when you came here?"

"No: but I had learned a good deal of that before I came; and so I soon fell into the ways here. Have you anybody to teach you?"

"No— yes— why, no. I thought Phil would have showed me things; but he does not seem to mind me at all." And Hugh bit his lip, and fanned himself faster.

"Ah! He attends to you more than you think."

"Does he? Then why— but what good does it do me?"

"What good? His holding off makes you push your own way. It lets you make friends for yourself."

"I have no friends here," said Hugh.

"Yes, you have. Here am I. You would not have had me, if you had been at Proctor's heels at this moment."

"Will you be my friend, then?"

"That I will."

"What, a great boy like you, that sits reading in a tree! But I may read here beside you. You said there was room for two."

"Ay; but you must not use it yet,—at least, not often, if you wish to do well here. Everybody knows I can play at anything. From the time I became captain of the wall at fives, I have had liberty to do what I like, without question. But you must show that you are up to play, before they will let you read in peace and quiet."

"But how can I, if— if—"

"Once show your spirit,—prove that you can shift for yourself, and you will find Phil open out wonderfully. He and you will forget all his shyness then. Once show him that he need not be ashamed of you—"

"Ashamed of me!" cried Hugh, firing up.

"Yes. Little boys are looked upon as girls in a school till they show that they are little men. And then again, you have been brought up with girls,—have not you?"

"To be sure; and so was he."

"And half the boys here, I dare say. Well, they are called Bettys till—"

"I am not a Betty," cried Hugh, flashing again.

"They suppose you are, because you part your hair, and do as you have been used to do at home."

"What business have they with my hair? I might as well call them Bruins for wearing theirs shaggy."

"Very true. They will let you and your hair alone when they see what you are made of; and then Phil will—"

"He will own me when I don't want it; and now, when he might help me, there he is, far off, never caring about what becomes of me!"

"O yes, he does. He is watching you all the time. You and he will have it all out some day before Christmas, and then you will see

how he really cares about you. Really your hair is very long,—too like a girl's. Shall I cut it for you?"

"I should like it," said Hugh, "but I don't want the boys to think I am afraid of them; or to begin giving up to them."

"You are right there. We will let it alone now, and cut it when it suits our convenience."

"What a nice place this is, to be sure!" cried Hugh, as the feeling of loneliness went off. "But the rooks do not make so much noise as I expected."

"You will find what they can do in that way when spring comes,—when they are building."

"And when may we go out upon the heath, and into the fields where the lambs are?"

"We go long walks on Saturday afternoons; but you do not expect to see young lambs in October, do you?"

"O, I forgot I never can remember the seasons for things."

"That shows you are a Londoner. You will learn all those things here. If you look for hares in our walks, you may chance to see one; or you may start a pheasant; but take care you don't mention lambs, or goslings, or cowslips, or any spring things; or you will never hear the last of it."

"Thank you: but what will poor Holt do? He is from India, and he knows very little about our ways."

"They may laugh at him; but they will not despise him as they might a Londoner. Being an Indian, and being a Londoner, are very different things."

"And yet how proud the Londoners are over the country! It is very odd."

"People are proud of their own ways all the world over. You will be proud of being a Crofton boy, by-and-by."

"Perhaps I am now, a little," said Hugh, blushing.

"What, already? Ah! You will do, I see. I have known old people proud of their age, and young people of their youth. I have seen poor people proud of their poverty; and everybody has seen

rich people proud of their wealth. I have seen happy people proud of their prosperity, and the afflicted proud of their afflictions. Yes; people can always manage to be proud: so you have boasted of being a Londoner up to this time; and from this time you will hold your head high as a Crofton boy."

"How long? Till when?"

"Ah! Till when? What next! What do you mean to be afterwards?"

"A soldier, or a sailor, or a great traveller, or something of that kind. I mean to go quite round the world, like Captain Cook."

"Then you will come home, proud of having been round the world; and you will meet with some old neighbour who boasts of having spent all his life in the house he was born in."

"Old Mr Dixon told mother that of himself, very lately. Oh dear, how often does the postman come?"

"You want a letter from home, do you? But you left them only yesterday morning."

"I don't know how to believe that,—it seems such an immense time! But when does the postman come?"

"Any day when he has letters to bring,—at about four in the afternoon. We see him come, from the school-room; but we do not know who the letters are for till school breaks up at five."

"O dear!" cried Hugh, thinking what the suspense must be, and the disappointment at last to twenty boys, perhaps, for one that was gratified. Firth advised him to write a letter home before he began to expect one. If he did not like to ask the usher, he himself would rule the paper for him, and he could write a bit at a time, after his lessons were done in the evening, till the sheet was full.

Hugh then told his grievance about the usher, and Firth thought that though it was not wise in Hugh to prate about Crofton on the top of the coach, it was worse to sit by and listen without warning, unless the listener meant to hold his own tongue. But he fancied the usher had since heard something which made him sorry; and the best way now was for Hugh to bear no malice, and remember nothing more of the affair than to be discreet in his future journeys.

“What is the matter there?” cried Hugh. “O dear! Something very terrible must have happened. How that boy is screaming!”

“It is only Lamb again,” replied Firth. “You will soon get used to his screaming. He is a very passionate boy—I never saw such a passionate fellow.”

“But what are they doing to him?”

“Somebody is putting him into a passion, I suppose. There is always somebody to do that.”

“What a shame!” cried Hugh.

“Yes: I see no wit in it,” replied Firth. “Anybody may do it. You have only to hold your little finger up to put him in a rage.”

Hugh thought Firth was rather cool about the matter. But Firth was not so cool when the throng opened for a moment, and showed what was really done to the angry boy. Only his head appeared above ground. His schoolfellows had put him into a hole they had dug, and had filled it up to his chin, stamping down the earth, so that the boy was perfectly helpless, while wild with rage.

“That is too bad!” cried Firth. “That would madden a saint.”

And he jumped down from the paling and ran towards the crowd. Hugh, forgetting his height from the ground, stood up in the tree, almost as angry as Lamb himself, and staring with all his might to see what he could. He saw Firth making his way through the crowd, evidently remonstrating, if not threatening. He saw him snatch a spade from a boy who was flourishing it in Lamb’s face. He saw that Firth was digging, though half-a-dozen boys had thrown themselves on his back, and hung on his arms. He saw that Firth persevered till Lamb had got his right arm out of the ground, and was striking everywhere within reach. Then he saw Firth dragged down and away, while the boys made a circle round Lamb, putting a foot or hand within his reach, and then snatching it away again, till the boy yelled with rage at the mockery.

Hugh could look on no longer. He scrambled down from the tree, scampered to the spot, burst through the throng, and seized Lamb’s hand. Lamb struck him a heavy blow, taking him for an enemy; but Hugh cried “I am your friend,” seized his hand again, and tugged till he was first red and then black in

the face, and till Lamb had worked his shoulders out of the hole, and seemed likely to have the use of his other arm in a trice.

Lamb's tormentors at first let Hugh alone in amazement; but they were not long in growing angry with him too. They hustled him—they pulled him all ways—they tripped him up; but Hugh's spirit was roused, and that brought his body up to the struggle again and again. He wrenched himself free, he scrambled to his feet again, as often as he was thrown down; and in a few minutes he had plenty of support. Phil was taking his part, and shielding him from many blows. Firth had got Lamb out of the hole, and the party against the tormentors was now so strong that they began to part off till the struggle ceased. Firth kept his grasp of the spade; for Lamb's passion still ran so high that there was no saying what might be the consequences of leaving any dangerous weapon within his reach. He was still fuming and stamping, Hugh gazing at him the while in wonder and fear.

"There stands your defender, Lamb," said Firth, "thinking he never saw a boy in a passion before. Come, have done with it for his sake: be a man, as he is. Here, help me to fill up this hole—both of you. Stamp down the earth, Lamb. Tread it well—tread your anger well down into it. Think of this little friend of yours here—a Crofton boy only yesterday."

Lamb did help to fill the hole, but he did not say a word—not one word to anybody till the dinner-bell rang. Then, at the pump, where the party were washing their hot and dirty and bruised hands, he held out his hand to Hugh, muttering, with no very good grace—

"I don't know what made you help me, but I will never be in a passion with you;—unless you put me out, that is."

Hugh replied that he had come to help because he never could bear to see anybody *made worse*. He always tried at home to keep the little boys and girls off "drunk old Tom," as he was called in the neighbourhood. It was such a shame to make anybody worse! Lamb looked as if he was going to fly at Hugh now: but Firth put his arm round Hugh's neck, and drew him into the house, saying in his ear—

"Don't say any more that you have no friends here. You have me for one; and you might have had another—two in one morning—but for your plain speaking about drunk old Tom."

"Did I say any harm?"

"No—no harm," replied Firth, laughing. "You will do, my boy—when you have got through a few scrapes. I'm your friend, at any rate."

Chapter Six.

First Ramble.

Hugh's afternoon lessons were harder than those of the morning; and in the evening he found he had so much to do that there was very little time left for writing his letter home. Some time there was, however; and Firth did not forget to rule his paper, and to let Hugh use his ink. Hugh had been accustomed to copy the prints he found in the Voyages and Travels he read; and he could never see a picture of a savage but he wanted to copy it. He was thus accustomed to a pretty free use of his slate-pencil. He now thought that it would save a great deal of description if he sent a picture or two in his letter: so he flourished off, on the first page, a sketch of Mr Tooke sitting at his desk at the top of the school, and of Mr Carnaby standing at his desk at the bottom of the school.

The next evening he made haste to fill up the sheet, for he found his business increasing upon his hands so fast that he did not know when he should get his letter off, if he did not despatch it at once. He was just folding it up when Tom Holt observed that it was a pity not to put some words into the mouths of the figures, to make them more animated; and he showed Hugh, by the curious carvings of their desks, how to put words into the mouths of figures. Hugh then remembered having seen this done in the caricatures in the print-shops in London; and he seized on the idea. He put into Mr Tooke's mouth the words which were oftenest heard from him, "Proceed, gentlemen;" and into Mr Carnaby's, "Hold your din."

Firth was too busy with his sense-verses to mind the little boys, as they giggled, with their heads close together, over Hugh's sheet of paper; but the usher was never too busy to be aware of any fun which might possibly concern his dignity. He had his eye on the new boys the whole while. He let Hugh direct his letter, and paint up a stroke or two which did not look so well as the rest; and it was not till Hugh was rolling the wafer about on his tongue that he interfered. Mr Carnaby then came up, tapped Hugh's head, told him not to get on so fast, for that every letter must be looked over before it went to the post. While saying

this, he took the letter, and put it into his waistcoat pocket. In vain Hugh begged to have it again, saying he would write another. The more he begged, and the more dismayed Tom Holt looked, the less Mr Carnaby would attend to either. Firth let himself be interrupted to hear the case: but he could do nothing in it. It was a general rule, which he thought every boy had known; and it was too late now to prevent the letter being looked over.

Mr Carnaby was so angry at the liberty Hugh had taken with his face and figure, that, in spite of all prayers, and a good many tears, he walked up the school with the letter, followed by poor Hugh, as soon as Mr Tooke had taken his seat next morning. Hugh thought that Holt, who had put him up to the most offensive part of the pictures, might have borne him company; but Holt was a timid boy, and he really had not courage to leave his seat. So Hugh stood alone, awaiting Mr Tooke's awful words, while the whole of the first class looked up from their books, in expectation of what was to happen. They waited some time for the master's words; for he was trying to help laughing. He and Mr Carnaby were so much alike in the pictures, and both so like South Sea islanders, that it was impossible to help laughing at the thought of this sketch going abroad as a representation of the Crofton masters. At last all parties laughed aloud, and Mr Tooke handed Hugh his wafer-glass, and bade him wafer up his letter, and by all means send it. Mr Carnaby could not remain offended if his principal was not angry: so here the matter ended, except that Hugh made some strong resolutions about his future letters, and that the corners of the master's mouth were seen to be out of their usual order several times in the course of the morning.

This incident, and everything which haunted Hugh's mind, and engrossed his attention, was a serious evil to him; for his business soon grew to be more than his habit of mind was equal to. In a few days, he learned to envy the boys (and they were almost the whole school) who could fix their attention completely and immediately on the work before them, and relax as completely, when it was accomplished. When his eyes were wandering, they observed boy after boy frowning over his dictionary, or repeating to himself, earnestly and without pause; and presently the business was done, and the learner at ease, feeling confident that he was ready to meet his master. After double the time had passed Hugh was still trying to get the meaning of his lesson into his head—going over the same words a dozen times, without gaining any notion of their meaning—suffering, in short from his long habit of inattention at home. He

did now try hard; but he seemed to get only headaches for his pains. His brother saw enough to make him very sorry for Hugh before ten days were over. He might not, perhaps, have been struck with his anxious countenance, his frequent starts, and his laying his head down on his desk because it ached so, if it had not been for what happened at night. Sometimes Hugh started out of bed, and began to dress, when the elder boys went up with their light, only an hour after the younger ones. Sometimes he would begin saying his syntax in the middle of the night, fancying he was standing before Mr Carnaby; and once he walked in his sleep as far as the head of the stairs, and then suddenly woke, and could not make out where he was. Phil should have told Mr Tooke of these things; but Hugh was so very anxious that nobody should know of his "tricks" (as the boys in his room called his troubles), that Phil only mentioned the matter to Mrs Watson, who had known so many bad sleepers among little boys, and had so little idea that the habit was anything new, that she took scarcely any notice of it. She had his hair cut very short and close, and saw that he took a moderate supper, and was satisfied that all would be well. Hugh did not part with his hair till he had joked himself about its length as much as any one could quiz him for it. When he had pulled it down over the end of his nose, and peeped through it, like an owl out of an ivy-bush, he might be supposed to part with it voluntarily, and not because he was laughed at.

Phil's observation of his brother's toil and trouble led him to give him some help. Almost every day he would hear Hugh say his lesson—or try to say it; for the poor boy seldom succeeded. Phil sometimes called him stupid, and sometimes refrained from saying so, whatever he might think; but there really was very little difference in the result, whether Phil heard the lessons beforehand or not; and it gave Joe Cape a great advantage over Phil that he had no little brother to attend to. Considering how selfish rivalship is apt to make boys (and even men), it was perhaps no wonder that Phil sometimes kept out of Hugh's way at the right hour, saying to himself that his proper business was to do his lessons, and get or keep ahead of Joe Cape; and that Hugh must take his chance, and work his own way, as other boys had to do. This conduct might not be wondered at in Phil; but it hurt Hugh, and made him do his lessons all the worse. He did not like to expose his brother's unkindness to any one, or he would oftener have asked Firth to help him. Firth, too, had plenty of work of his own to do. More than once, however, Firth met the little lad, wandering about, with his grammar in his hand, in search of the hidden Phil; and then Firth would stop him, and sit down with him, and have patience, and give him

such clear explanations, such good examples of the rules he was to learn, that it all became easy, and Hugh found his lessons were to him only what those of other boys seemed to them. Still, however, and at the best, Hugh was, as a learner, far too much at the mercy of circumstances—the victim of what passed before his eyes, or was said within his hearing.

Boys who find difficulty in attending to their lessons are sure to be more teased with interruptions than any others. Holt had not the habit of learning; and he and Hugh were continually annoyed by the boys who sat near them watching how they got on, and making remarks upon them. One day, Mr Tooke was called out of the school-room to a visitor, and Mr Carnaby went up to take the master's place, and hear his class. This was too good an opportunity for the boys below to let slip; and they began to play tricks,—most of them directed against Hugh and Tom Holt. One boy, Warner, began to make the face that always made Holt laugh, however he tried to be grave. Page drew a caricature of Mrs Watson on his slate, and held it up; and Davison took a mask out of his desk, and even ventured to tie it on, as if it had not been school-time.

"I declare I can't learn my lesson—'tis too bad!" cried Hugh.

"'Tis a shame!" said Tom Holt, sighing for breath after his struggle not to laugh. "We shall never be ready."

Hugh made gestures of indignation at the boys, which only caused worse faces to be made, and the mask to nod.

"We wont look at them," proposed Holt. "Let us cover our eyes, and not look up at all."

Hugh put his hands before his eyes; but still his mind's eye saw the grinning mask, and his lesson did not get on. Besides, a piece of wet sponge lighted on the very page he was learning from. He looked up fiercely, to see who had thrown it. It was no other than Tooke, who belonged to that class:—it was Tooke, to judge by his giggle, and his pretending to hide his face, as if ashamed. Hugh tossed back the sponge, so as to hit Tooke on the nose. Then Tooke was angry, and threw it again, and the sponge passed backwards and forwards several times: for Hugh was by this time very angry,—boiling with indignation at the hardship of not being able to learn his lesson, when he really would if he could. While the sponge was still passing to and fro, Mr Carnaby's voice was heard from the far end of the room, desiring Warner, Page, Davison, and Tooke to be quiet, and let

the boys alone till Mr Tooke came in, when Mr Tooke would take his own measures.

Hugh, wondering how Mr Carnaby knew, at that distance, what was going on, found that Holt was no longer by his side. In a moment, Holt returned to his seat, flushed and out of breath. A very slight hiss was heard from every form near, as he came down the room.

"O! Holt! You have been telling tales!" cried Hugh.

"Telling tales!" exclaimed Holt, in consternation, for Holt knew nothing of school ways. "I never thought of that. They asked me to tell Mr Carnaby that we could not learn our lessons."

"They! Who? I am sure I never asked you."

"No; you did not: but Harvey and Prince did,—and Gillingham. They said Mr Carnaby would soon make those fellows quiet; and they told me to go."

"You hear! They are calling you 'tell-tale.' That will be your name now. Oh, Holt! You should not have told tales. However, I will stand by you," Hugh continued, seeing the terror that Holt was in.

"I meant no harm," said Holt, trembling. "Was not it a shame that they would not let us learn our lessons?"

"Yes, it was—but—"

At this moment Mr Tooke entered the room. As he passed the forms, the boys were all bent over their books, as if they could think of nothing else. Mr Tooke walked up the room to his desk, and Mr Carnaby walked down the room to *his* desk; and then Mr Carnaby said, quite aloud,—

"Mr Tooke, sir."

"Well."

Here Holt sprang from his desk, and ran to the usher, and besought him not to say a word about what Warner's class had been doing. He even hung on Mr Carnaby's arm in entreaty; but Mr Carnaby shook him off, and commanded him back to his seat. Then the whole school heard Mr Tooke told about the wry faces and the mask, and the trouble of the little boys. Mr Tooke was not often angry; but when he was, his face grew white, and

his lips trembled. His face was white now. He stood up, and called before him the little boy who had informed. Hugh chose to go with Holt, though Holt had not gone up with him about the letter, the other day; and Holt felt how kind this was. Mr Tooke desired to know who the offenders were; and as they were named, he called to them to stand up in their places. Then came the sentence. Mr Tooke would never forgive advantage being taken of his absence. If there were boys who could not be trusted while his back was turned, they must be made to remember him when he was out of sight, by punishment. Page must remain in school after hours, to learn twenty lines of Virgil; Davison twenty; Tooke forty—

Here everybody looked round to see how Tooke bore his father being so angry with him.

"Please, sir," cried one boy, "I saw little Proctor throw a sponge at Tooke. He did it twice."

"Never mind!" answered Tooke. "I threw it at him first. It is my sponge."

"And Warner," continued the master, as if he had not heard the interruption, "considering that Warner has got off too easily for many pranks of late,—Warner seventy."

Seventy! The idea of having anybody condemned, through him, to learn seventy lines of Latin by heart, made Holt so miserable that the word seventy seemed really to prick his very ears. Though Mr Tooke's face was still white, Holt ventured up to him, "Pray, sir—"

"Not a word of intercession for those boys," said the master. "I will not hear a word in their favour."

"Then, sir—"

"Well."

"I only want to say, then, that Proctor told no tales, sir. I did not mean any harm, sir, but I told because—"

"Never mind that," cried Hugh, afraid that he would now be telling of Harvey, Prince, and Gillingham, who had persuaded him to go up.

"I have nothing to do with that. That is your affair," said the master, sending the boys back to their seats.

Poor Holt had cause to rue this morning, for long after. He was weary of the sound of hissing, and of the name "tell-tale;" and the very boys who had prompted him to go up were at first silent, and then joined against him. He complained to Hugh of the difficulty of knowing what it was right to do. He had been angry on Hugh's account chiefly; and he still thought it *was* very unjust to hinder their lessons, when they wished not to be idle: and yet they were all treating him as if he had done something worse than the boys with the mask. Hugh thought all this was true: but he believed it was settled among schoolboys (though Holt had never had the opportunity of knowing it) that it was a braver thing for boys to bear any teasing from one another than to call in the power of the master to help. A boy who did that was supposed not to be able to take care of himself; and for this he was despised, besides being disliked, for having brought punishment upon his companions.

Holt wished Hugh had not been throwing sponges at the time:— he wished Hugh had prevented his going up. He would take good care how he told tales again.

"You had better say so," advised Hugh; "and then they will see that you had never been at school, and did not know how to manage."

The first Saturday had been partly dreaded, and partly longed for, by Hugh. He had longed for the afternoon's ramble; but Saturday morning was the time for saying tables, among other things. Nothing happened as he had expected. The afternoon was so rainy that there was no going out; and, as for the tables, he was in a class of five; and "four times seven" did not come to him in regular course. Eight times seven did, and he said "fifty-six" with great satisfaction, Mr Carnaby asked him afterwards the dreaded question, but he was on his guard; and as he answered it right, and the usher had not found out the joke, he hoped he should hear no more of the matter.

The next Saturday was fine, and at last he was to have the walk he longed for. The weekly repetitions were over, dinner was done, Mr Carnaby appeared with his hat on, the whole throng burst into the open air, and out of bounds, and the new boys were wild with expectation and delight. When they had passed the churchyard and the green, and were wading through the sandy road which led up to the heath, Firth saw Hugh running and leaping hither and thither, not knowing what to do with his spirits. Firth called him, and putting his arm round Hugh's neck, so as to keep him prisoner, said he did not know how he might want his strength before he got home, and he had better not

spend it on a bit of sandy road. So Hugh was made to walk quietly, and gained his breath before the breezy heath was reached.

On the way, he saw that a boy of the name of Dale, whom he had never particularly observed before, was a good deal teased by some boys who kept crossing their hands before them, and curtseying like girls, talking in a mincing way, and calling one another Amelia, with great affectation. Dale tried to get away, but he was followed, whichever way he turned.

"What do they mean by that?" inquired Hugh of Firth.

"Dale has a sister at a school not far off, and her name is Amelia; and she came to see him to-day. Ah! You have not found out yet that boys are laughed at about their sisters, particularly if the girls have fine names."

"What a shame!" cried Hugh; words which he had used very often already since he came to Crofton.

He broke from Firth, ran up to Dale, and said to him, in a low voice, "I have two sisters, and one of them is called Agnes."

"Don't let them come to see you, then, or these fellows will quiz you as they do me. As if I could help having a sister Amelia!"

"Why, you are not sorry for that? You would not wish your sister dead, or not born, would you?"

"No; but I wish she was not hereabouts: that is, I wish she had not come up to the pales, with the maid-servant behind her, for everybody to see. And then, when Mr Tooke sent us into the orchard together, some spies were peeping over the wall at us all the time."

"I only wish Agnes would come," cried Hugh, "and I would—"

"Ah! You think so now; but depend upon it, you would like much better to see her at home. Why, her name is finer than my sister's! I wonder what girls ever have such names for!"

"I don't see that these names are finer than some boys' names. There's Frazer, is not his name Colin? And then there's Hercules Fisticuff—"

"Why, you know—to be sure you know that is a nick-name?" said Dale.

"Is it? I never thought of that," replied Hugh. "What is his real name?"

"Samuel Jones. However, there is Colin Frazer—and Fry, his name is Augustus Adolphus; I will play them off the next time they quiz Amelia. How old is your sister Agnes?"

Then the two boys wandered off among the furze bushes, talking about their homes; and in a little while they had so opened their hearts to each other, that they felt as if they had always been friends. Nobody thought any more about them when once the whole school was dispersed over the heath. Some boys made for a hazel copse, some way beyond the heath, in hopes of finding a few nuts already ripe. Others had boats to float on the pond. A large number played leap-frog, and some ran races. Mr Carnaby threw himself down on a soft couch of wild thyme, on a rising ground, and took out his book. So Dale and Hugh felt themselves unobserved, and they chatted away at a great rate. Not but that an interruption or two did occur. They fell in with a flock of geese, and Hugh did not much like their appearance, never having heard a goose make a noise before. He had eaten roast goose, and he had seen geese in the feathers at the poulterers'; but he had never seen them alive, and stretching their necks at passengers. He flinched at the first moment. Dale, who never imagined that a boy who was not afraid of his schoolfellows could be afraid of geese, luckily mistook the movement, and said, "Ay, get a switch,—a bunch of furze will do, and we will be rid of the noisy things."

He drove them away, and Hugh had now learned, for ever, how much noise geese can make, and how little they are to be feared.

They soon came upon some creatures which were larger and stronger, and with which Hugh was no better acquainted. Some cows were grazing, or had been grazing, till a party of boys came up. They were now restless, moving uneasily about, so that Dale himself hesitated for a moment which way to go. Lamb was near,—the passionate boy, who was nobody's friend, and who was therefore seldom at play with others. He was also something of a coward, as any one might know from his frequent bullying. He and Holt happened to be together at this time; and it was their appearance of fright at the restless cows which frightened Hugh. One cow at last began to trot towards them at a pretty good rate. Lamb ran off to the right, and the two little boys after him, though Dale pulled at Hugh's hand to make him stand still, as Dale chose to do himself. He pulled in vain—Hugh burst away, and off went the three boys, over the

hillocks and through the furze, the cow trotting at some distance behind. They did not pause till Lamb had led them off the heath into a deep lane, different from the one by which they had come. The cow stopped at a patch of green grass, just at the entrance of the hollow way; and the runners therefore could take breath.

"Now we are here," said Lamb, "I will show you a nice place,—a place where we can get something nice. How thirsty I am!"

"And so am I," declared Holt, smacking his dry tongue. Hugh's mouth was very dry too, between the run and the fright.

"Well, then, come along with me, and I will show you," said Lamb.

Hugh thought they ought not to go farther from the heath: but Lamb said they would get back by another way,—through a gate belonging to a friend of his. They could not get back the way they came, because the cow was there still. He walked briskly on till they came to a cottage, over whose door swung a sign; and on the sign was a painting of a bottle and a glass, and a heap of things which were probably meant for cakes, as there were cakes in the window. Here Lamb turned in, and the woman seemed to know him well. She smiled, and closed the door behind the three boys, and asked them to sit down: but Lamb said there was no time for that to-day,—she must be quick. He then told the boys that they would have some ginger-beer.

"But may we?" asked the little boys.

"To be sure; who is to prevent us? You shall see how you like ginger-beer when you are thirsty."

The woman declared that it was the most wholesome thing in the world; and if the young gentleman did not find it so, she would never ask him to taste her ginger-beer again. Hugh thanked them both; but he did not feel quite comfortable. He looked at Holt, to find out what he thought: but Holt was quite engrossed with watching the woman untwisting the wire of the first bottle. The cork did not fly; indeed there was some difficulty in getting it out: so Lamb waived his right, as the eldest, to drink first; and the little boys were so long in settling which should have it, that the little spirit there was had all gone off before Hugh began to drink; and he did not find ginger-beer such particularly good stuff as Lamb had said. He would have liked a drink of water better. The next bottle was very brisk: so

Lamb seized upon it; and the froth hung round his mouth when he had done: but Holt was no better off with his than Hugh had been. They were both urged to try their luck again. Hugh would not: but Holt did once; and Lamb, two or three times. Then the woman offered them some cakes upon a plate: and the little boys thanked her, and took each one. Lamb put some in his pocket, and advised the others to do the same, as they had no time to spare. He kept some room in his pocket, however, for some plums; and told the boys that they might carry theirs in their handkerchiefs, or in their caps, if they would take care to have finished before they came within sight of the usher. He then asked the woman to let them out upon the heath through her garden gate; and she said she certainly would when they had paid. She then stood drumming with her fingers upon the table, and looking through the window, as if waiting.

"Come, Proctor, you have half-a-crown," said Lamb. "Out with it!"

"My half-crown!" exclaimed Proctor. "You did not say I had anything to pay."

"As if you did not know that, without my telling you! You don't think people give away their good things, I suppose! Come,—where's your half-crown? My money is all at home."

Holt had nothing with him either. Lamb asked the woman what there was to pay. She seemed to count and consider; and Holt told Hugh afterwards that he saw Lamb wink at her. She then said that the younger gentlemen had had the most plums and cakes. The charge was a shilling a piece for them, and sixpence for Master Lamb:—half-a-crown exactly. Hugh protested he never meant anything like this, and that he wanted part of his half-crown to buy a comb with; and he would have emptied out the cakes and fruit he had left; but the woman stopped him, saying that she never took back what she had sold. Lamb hurried him, too, declaring that their time was up; and he even thrust his finger and thumb into Hugh's inner pocket, and took out the half-crown, which he gave to the woman. He was sure that Hugh could wait for his comb till Holt paid him, and the woman said she did not see that any more combing was wanted: the young gentleman's hair looked so pretty as it was. She then showed them through the garden, and gave them each a marigold full-blown. She unlocked her gate, pushed them through, locked it behind them, and left them to hide their purchases as well as they could. Though the little boys stuffed their pockets till the ripest plums burst, and wetted the linings,

they could not dispose of them all; and they were obliged to give away a good many.

Hugh went in search of his new friend, and drew him aside from the rest to relate his trouble. Dale wondered he had not found out Lamb before this, enough to refuse to follow his lead. Lamb would never pay a penny. He always spent the little money he had upon good things, the first day or two; and then he got what he could out of any one who was silly enough to trust him.

"But," said Hugh, "the only thing we had to do with each other before was by my being kind to him."

"That makes no difference," said Dale.

"But what a bad boy he must be! To be sure, he will pay me, when he knows how much I want a comb."

"He will tell you to buy it out of your five shillings. You let him know you had five shillings in Mrs Watson's hands."

"Yes; but he knows how I mean to spend that,—for presents to carry home at Christmas. But I'll never tell him anything again. Oh! Dale! Do you really think he will never pay me?"

"He never pays anybody; that is all I know. Come,—forget it all, as fast as you can. Let us go and see if we can get any nuts."

Hugh did not at all succeed in his endeavours to forget his adventure. The more he thought about it, the worse it seemed; and the next time he spoke to Holt, and told him to remember that he owed him a shilling, Holt said he did not know that,—he did not mean to spend a shilling; and it was clear that it was only his fear of Hugh's speaking to Mrs Watson or the usher, that prevented his saying outright that he should not pay it. Hugh felt very hot, and bit his lip to make his voice steady when he told Dale, on the way home, that he did not believe he should ever see any part of his half-crown again. Dale thought so too; but he advised him to do nothing more than keep the two debtors up to the remembrance of their debt. If he told so powerful a person as Firth, it would be almost as much tale-telling as if he went to the master at once; and Hugh himself had no inclination to expose his folly to Phil, who was already quite sufficiently ashamed of his inexperience. So poor Hugh threw the last of his plums to some cottager's children on the green, in his way home; and, when he set foot within bounds again, he heartily wished that this Saturday afternoon had been

rainy too; for any disappointment would have been better than this scrape.

While learning his lessons for Monday, he forgot the whole matter; and then he grew merry over the great Saturday night's washing; but after he was in bed, it flashed upon him that he should meet uncle and aunt Shaw in church to-morrow, and they would speak to Phil and him after church; and his uncle might ask after the half-crown. He determined not to expose his companions, at any rate: but his uncle would be displeased; and this thought was so sad that Hugh cried himself to sleep. His uncle and aunt were at church the next morning; and Hugh could not forget the ginger-beer, or help watching his uncle: so that, though he tried several times to attend to the sermon; he knew nothing about it when it was done. His uncle observed in the churchyard that they must have had a fine ramble the day before; but did not say anything about pocket-money. Neither did he name a day for his nephews to visit him, though he said they must come before the days grew much shorter. So Hugh thought he had got off very well thus far. In the afternoon, however, Mrs Watson, who invited him and Holt into her parlour, to look over the pictures in her great Bible, was rather surprised to find how little Hugh could tell her of the sermon, considering how much he had remembered the Sunday before. She had certainly thought that to-day's sermon had been the simpler, and the more interesting to young people, of the two. Her conversation with Hugh did him good, however. It reminded him of his mother's words, and of her expectations from him; and it made him resolve to bear, not only his loss, but any blame which might come upon him silently, and without betraying anybody. He had already determined, fifty times within the twenty-four hours, never to be so weakly led again, when his own mind was doubtful, as he had felt it all the time from leaving the heath to getting back to it again. He began to reckon on the Christmas holidays, when he should have five weeks at home, free from the evils of both places,—from lessons with Miss Harold, and from Crofton scrapes.

It is probable that the whole affair would have passed over quietly, and the woman in the lane might have made large profits by other inexperienced boys, and Mr Carnaby might have gone on being careless as to where the boys went out of his sight on Saturdays, but that Tom Holt ate too many plums on the present occasion. On Sunday morning he was not well; and was so ill by the evening, and all Monday, that he had to be regularly nursed; and when he left his bed, he was taken to Mrs Watson's parlour,—the comfortable, quiet place where invalid

boys enjoyed themselves. Poor Holt was in very low spirits; and Mrs Watson was so kind that he could not help telling her that he owed a shilling, and he did not know how he should ever pay it; and that Hugh Proctor, who had been his friend till now, seemed on a sudden much more fond of Dale; and this made it harder to be in debt to him.

The wet, smeared lining of the pockets had told Mrs Watson already that there had been some improper indulgence in good things; and when she heard what part Lamb had played towards the little boys, she thought it right to tell Mr Tooke. Mr Tooke said nothing till Holt was in the school again, which was on Thursday; and not then till the little boys had said their lessons, at past eleven o'clock. They were drawing on their slates, and Lamb was still mumbling over his book, without getting on, when the master's awful voice was heard, calling up before him Lamb, little Proctor, and Holt. All three started, and turned red; so that the school concluded them guilty before it was known what they were charged with. Dale knew,—and he alone; and very sorry he was, for the intimacy between Hugh and him had grown very close indeed since Saturday.

The master was considerate towards the younger boys. He made Lamb tell the whole. Even when the cowardly lad "bellowed" (as his school-fellows called his usual mode of crying) so that nothing else could be heard, Mr Tooke waited, rather than question the other two. When the whole story was extracted, in all its shamefulness, from Lamb's own lips, the master expressed his disgust. He said nothing about the money part of it—about how Hugh was to be paid. He probably thought it best for the boys to take the consequences of their folly in losing their money. He handed the little boys over to Mr Carnaby to be caned—"To make them remember," as he said; though they themselves were pretty sure they should never forget. Lamb was kept to be punished by the master himself. Though Lamb knew he should be severely flogged, and though he was the most cowardly boy in the school, he did not suffer so much as Hugh did in the prospect of being caned—being punished at all. Phil, who knew his brother's face well, saw, as he passed down the room, how miserable he was—too miserable to cry; and Phil pulled him by the sleeve, and whispered that being caned was nothing to mind—only a stroke or two across the shoulders. Hugh shook his head, as much as to say, "It is not that."

No—it was not the pain. It was the being punished in open school, and when he did not feel that he deserved it. How

should he know where Lamb was taking him? How should he know that the ginger-beer was to be paid for, and that he was to pay? He felt himself injured enough already: and now to be punished in addition! He would have died on the spot for liberty to tell Mr Tooke and everybody what he thought of the way he was treated. He had felt his mother hard sometimes; but what had she ever done to him compared with this? It was well he thought of his mother. At the first moment, the picture of home in his mind nearly made him cry—the thing of all others he most wished to avoid while so many eyes were on him; but the remembrance of what his mother expected of him—her look when she told him *he must not fail*, gave him courage. Hard as it was to be, as he believed, unjustly punished, it was better than having done anything very wrong—anything that he really could not have told his mother.

Mr Carnaby foresaw that a rebuke was in store for him for his negligence during the walk on Saturday; and this anticipation did not sweeten his mood. He kept the little boys waiting, though Holt was trembling very much, and still weak from his illness. It occurred to the usher that another person might be made uncomfortable; and he immediately acted on the idea. He had observed how fond of one another Dale and Hugh had become; and he thought he would plague Dale a little. He therefore summoned him, and desired him to go, and bring him a switch, to cane these boys with.

"I have broken my cane; so bring me a stout switch," said he. "Bring me one out of the orchard; one that will lay on well—one that will not break with a good hard stroke;—mind what I say—one that will not break."

"Yes, sir," replied Dale, readily; and he went as if he was not at all unwilling. Holt shivered. Hugh never moved.

It was long, very long, before Dale returned. When he did, he brought a remarkably stout broomstick.

"This won't break, I think, sir," said he.

The boys giggled. Mr Carnaby knuckled Dale's head as he asked him if he called that a switch.

"Bring me a *switch*" said he. "One that is not too stout, or else it will not sting. It must sting, remember,—sting well. Not too stout, remember."

"Yes, sir," said Dale; and away he went again.

He was now gone yet longer; and by the time he returned everybody's eyes were fixed on the door, to see what sort of a switch would next appear. Dale entered, bringing a straw.

"I think this will not be too stout, sir."

Everybody laughed but Hugh—even Holt.

There was that sneer about Mr Carnaby's nose which made everybody sorry now for Dale: but everybody started, Mr Carnaby and all, at Mr Tooke's voice, close at hand. How much he had seen and heard, there was no knowing; but it was enough to make him look extremely stern.

"Are these boys not caned yet, Mr Carnaby?"

"No, sir:—I have not—I—"

"Have they been standing here all this while?"

"Yes, sir. I have no cane, sir. I have been sending—"

"I ordered them an immediate caning, Mr Carnaby, and not mental torture. School is up," he declared to the boys at large. "You may go—you have been punished enough," he said to the little boys. "Mr Carnaby, have the goodness to remain a moment."

And the large room was speedily emptied of all but the master, the usher, and poor Lamb.

"The usher will catch it now," observed some boys, as the master himself shut the door behind them. "He will get well paid for his spite."

"What will be done to him?" asked Hugh of Dale, whom he loved fervently for having saved him from punishment.

"Oh, I don't know; and I don't care—though he was just going to give my head some sound raps against the wall, if Mr Tooke had not come up at the moment."

"But what *will* be done to Mr Carnaby?"

"Never mind what: he won't be here long, they say. Fisher says there is another coming; and Carnaby is here only till that other is at liberty."

This was good news, if true: and Hugh ran off, quite in spirits, to play. He had set himself diligently to learn to play, and would not be driven off; and Dale had insisted on fair scope for him. He played too well to be objected to any more. They now went to leap-frog; and when too hot to keep it up any longer, he and Dale mounted into the apple-tree to talk, while they were cooling, and expecting the dinner-bell.

Something happened very wonderful before dinner. The gardener went down to the main road, and seemed to be looking out. At last he hailed the London coach. Hugh and Dale could see from their perch. The coach stopped, the gardener ran back, met Mr Carnaby under the chestnuts, relieved him of his portmanteau, and helped him to mount the coach.

"Is he going? Gone for good?" passed from mouth to mouth, all over the playground.

"Gone for good," was the answer of those who knew to a certainty.

The boys set up first a groan, so loud that perhaps the departing usher heard it. Then they gave a shout of joy, in which the little boys joined with all their might—Hugh waving his cap in the apple-tree.

Chapter Seven.

What is only to be had at Home.

Hugh got on far better with his lessons as he grew more intimate with Dale. It was not so much that Dale helped him with his grammar and construing (for Dale thought every boy should make shift to do his own business) as that he liked to talk about his work, even with a younger boy; and so, as he said, clear his head. A great deal that he said was above Hugh's comprehension; and much of his repetitions mere words: but there were other matters which fixed Hugh's attention, and proved to him that study might be interesting out of school. When Dale had a theme to write, the two boys often walked up and down the playground for half an hour together, talking the subject over, and telling of anything they had heard or read upon it. Hugh presently learned the names and the meanings of the different parts of a theme; and he could sometimes help with an illustration or example, though he left it to his friend to

lay down the Proposition, and search out the Confirmation. Dale's nonsense-verses were perfect nonsense to Hugh: but his construing was not: and when he went over it aloud, for the purpose of fixing his lesson in his ear, as well as his mind, Hugh was sorry when they arrived at the end, and eager to know what came next,—particularly if they had to stop in the middle of a story of Ovid's. Every week, almost every day now, made a great difference in Hugh's school-life. He still found his lessons very hard work, and was often in great fear and pain about them,—but he continually perceived new light breaking in upon his mind: his memory served him better; the little he had learned came when he wanted it, instead of just a minute too late. He rose in the morning with less anxiety about the day: and when playing, could forget school.

There was no usher yet in Mr Carnaby's place; and all the boys said their lessons to Mr Tooke himself: which Hugh liked very much, when he had got over the first fear. A writing-master came from a distance twice a week, when the whole school was at writing and arithmetic all the afternoon: but every other lesson was said to the master; and this was likely to go on till Christmas, as the new usher, of whom, it was said, Mr Tooke thought so highly as to choose to wait for him, could not come before that time. Of course, with so much upon his hands, Mr Tooke had not a moment to spare; and slow or idle boys were sent back to their desks at the first trip or hesitation in their lessons. Hugh was afraid, at the outset, that he should be like poor Lamb, who never got a whole lesson said during these weeks: and he was turned down sometimes; but not often enough to depress him. He learned to trust more to his ear and his memory: his mind became excited, as in playing a game: and he found he got through, he scarcely knew how. His feeling of fatigue afterwards proved to him that this was harder work than he had ever done at home; but he did not feel it so at the time. When he could learn a lesson in ten minutes, and say it in one; when he began to use Latin phrases in his private thoughts, and saw the meaning of a rule of syntax, so as to be able to find a fresh example out of his own head, he felt himself really a Crofton boy, and his heart grew light within him.

The class to which Hugh belonged was one day standing waiting to be heard, when the master was giving a subject and directions for an English theme to Dale's class. The subject was the Pleasures of Friendship. In a moment Hugh thought of Damon and Pythias, and of David and Jonathan,—of the last of whom there was a picture in Mrs Watson's great Bible. He thought how happy he had been since he had known Dale, and

his heart was in such a glow, he was sure he could write a theme. He ran after Mr Tooke when school was over, and asked whether he might write a theme with Dale's class. When Mr Tooke found he knew what was meant by writing a theme, he said he might try, if he neglected nothing for it, and wrote every word of it himself, without consultation with any one.

Hugh scampered away to tell Dale that they must not talk over this theme together, as they were both to do it; and then, instead of playing, he went to his desk, and wrote upon his slate till it was quite full. He had to borrow two slates before he had written all he had to say. Phil ruled his paper for him; but before he had copied one page, his neighbours wanted their slates back again,—said they must have them, and rubbed out all he had written. Much of the little time he had was lost in this way, and he grew wearied. He thought at first that his theme would be very beautiful: but he now began to doubt whether it would be worth anything at all; and he was vexed to have tired himself with doing what would only make him laughed at. The first page was well written out,—the Confirmation being properly separated from the Proposition: but he had to write all the latter part directly from his head upon the paper, as the slates were taken away; and he forgot to separate the Conclusion from the Inference.

He borrowed a penknife, and tried to scratch out half a line; but he only made a hole in the paper, and was obliged to let the line stand. Then he found he had strangely forgotten to put in the chief thing of all,—about friends telling one another of their faults,—though, on consideration, he was not sure that this was one of the Pleasures of Friendship: so, perhaps, it did not much matter. But there were two blots; and he had left out Jonathan's name, which had to be interlined. Altogether, it had the appearance of a very bad theme. Firth came and looked over his shoulder, as he was gazing at it; and Firth offered to write it out for him; and even thought it would be fair, as he had had nothing to do with the composition: but Hugh could not think it would be fair, and said, sighing, that his must take its chance. He did not think he could have done a theme so very badly.

Mr Tooke beckoned him up with Dale's class, when they carried up their themes; and, seeing how red his face was, the master bade him not be afraid. But how could he help being afraid? The themes were not read directly. It was Mr Tooke's practice to read them out of school-hours. On this occasion, judgment was given the last thing before school broke up the next morning.

Hugh had never been more astonished in his life. Mr Tooke praised his theme very much, and said it had surprised him. He did not mind the blots and mistakes, which would, he said, have been great faults in a copy-book, but were of less consequence than other things in a theme. Time and pains would correct slovenliness of that kind; and the thoughts and language were good. Hugh was almost out of his wits with delight; so nearly so that he spoiled his own pleasure completely. He could not keep his happiness to himself, or his vanity: for Hugh had a good deal of vanity,—more than he was aware of before this day. He told several boys what Mr Tooke had said: but he soon found that would not do. Some were indifferent, but most laughed at him. Then he ran to Mrs Watson's parlour, and knocked. Nobody answered; for the room was empty: so Hugh sought her in various places, and at last found her in the kitchen, boiling some preserves.

"What do you come here for? This is no place for you," said she, when the maids tried in vain to put Hugh out.

"I only want to tell you one thing," cried Hugh; and he repeated exactly what Mr Tooke had said of his theme. Mrs Watson laughed, and the maids laughed, and Hugh left them, angry with them, but more angry with himself. They did not care for him,—nobody cared for him, he said to himself; he longed for his mother's look or approbation when he had done well, and Agnes' pleasure, and even Susan's fondness and praise. He sought Dale. Dale was in the midst of a game, and had not a word or look to spare till it was over. The boys would have admitted Hugh; for he could now play as well as anybody; but he was in no mood for play now. He climbed his tree, and sat there, stinging his mind with the thought of his having carried his boastings into the kitchen, and with his recollection of Mrs Watson's laugh.

It often happened that Firth and Hugh met at this tree; and it happened now. There was room for both; and Firth mounted, and read for some time. At last he seemed to be struck by Hugh's restlessness and heavy sighs; and he asked whether he had not got something to amuse himself with.

"No. I don't want to amuse myself," said Hugh, stretching so as almost to throw himself out of the tree.

"Why, what's the matter? Did you not come off well with your theme? I heard somebody say you were quite enough set up about it."

"Where is the use of doing a thing well, if nobody cares about it?" said Hugh. "I don't believe anybody at Crofton cares a bit about me—cares whether I get on well or ill—except Dale. If I take pains and succeed, they only laugh at me."

"Ah! You don't understand school and schoolboys yet," replied Firth. "To do a difficult lesson well is a grand affair at home, and the whole house knows of it. But it is the commonest thing in the world here. If you learn to feel with these boys, instead of expecting them to feel with you (which they cannot possibly do), you will soon find that they care for you accordingly."

Hugh shook his head.

"You will find it in every school in England," continued Firth, "that it is not the way of boys to talk about feelings—about anybody's feelings. That is the reason why they do not mention their sisters or their mothers—except when two confidential friends are together, in a tree, or by themselves in the meadows. But, as sure as ever a boy is full of action—if he tops the rest at play—holds his tongue, or helps others generously—or shows a manly spirit without being proud of it, the whole school is his friend. You have done well, so far, by growing more and more sociable; but you will lose ground if you boast about your lessons out of school. To prosper at Crofton, you must put off home, and make yourself a Crofton boy."

"I don't care about that," said Hugh. "I give it all up. There is nothing but injustice here."

"Nothing but injustice! Pray, am I unjust?"

"No—not you—not so far. But—"

"Is Mr Tooke unjust?"

"Yes—very."

"Pray how, and when?"

"He has been so unjust to me, that if it had not been for something, I could not have borne it. I am not going to tell you what that something is: only you need not be afraid but that I can bear everything. If the whole world was against me—"

"Well, never mind what that something is; but tell me how Mr Tooke is unjust to you."

"He punished me when I did not deserve it; and he praised me when I did not deserve it. I was cheated and injured that Saturday; and, instead of seeing me righted, Mr Tooke ordered me to be punished. And to-day, when my theme was so badly done that I made sure of being blamed, he praised me."

"This might be injustice at home," replied Firth, "because parents know, or ought to know, all that is in their children's minds, and exactly what their children can do. A schoolmaster can judge only by what he sees. Mr Tooke does not know yet that you could have done your theme better than you did—as your mother would have known. When he finds you can do better, he will not praise such a theme again. Meantime, how you can boast of his praise, if you think it unjust, is the wonder to me."

"So it is to me now. I wish I had never asked to do that theme at all," cried Hugh, again stretching himself to get rid of his shame. "But why did Mr Tooke order me to be caned? Why did he not make Lamb and Holt pay me what they owe? I was injured before: and he injured me more."

"You were to be caned because you left the heath and entered a house without leave—not because you had been cheated of your money."

"But I did not know where I was going. I never meant to enter a house."

"But you did both; and what you suffered will prevent your letting yourself be led into such a scrape again. As for the money part of the matter—a school is to boys what the world is when they become men. They must manage their own affairs among themselves. The difference is, that here is the master to be applied to, if we choose. He will advise you about your money, if you choose to ask him: but, for my part, I would rather put up with the loss, if I were you."

"Nobody will ever understand what I mean about justice," muttered Hugh.

"Suppose," said Firth, "while you are complaining of injustice in this way, somebody else should be complaining in the same way of your injustice."

"Nobody can—fairly," replied Hugh.

"Do you see that poor fellow, skulking there under the orchard-wall?"

"What, Holt?"

"Yes, Holt. I fancy the thought in his mind at this moment is that you are the most unjust person at Crofton."

"I! Unjust!"

"Yes; so he thinks. When you first came, you and he were companions. You found comfort in each other while all the rest were strangers to you. You were glad to hear, by the hour together, what he had to tell you about India, and his voyages and travels. Now he feels himself lonely and forsaken, while he sees you happy with a friend. He thinks it hard that you should desert him because he owes you a shilling, when he was cheated quite as much as you."

"Because he owes me a shilling!" cried Hugh, starting to his feet, "as if—"

Once more he had nearly fallen from his perch. Firth caught him; and then asked him how Holt should think otherwise than as he did, since Hugh had been his constant companion up to that Saturday afternoon, and had hardly spoken to him since.

Hugh protested that the shilling had nothing to do with the matter; and he never meant to take more than sixpence from Holt, because he thought Lamb was the one who ought to pay the shilling. The thing was, he did not, and could not, like Holt half so well as Dale. He could not make a friend of Holt, because he wanted spirit—he had no courage. What could he do? He could not pretend to be intimate with Holt when he did not like him; and if he explained that the shilling had nothing to do with the matter, he could not explain how it really was, when the fault was in the boy's character, and not in his having given any particular offence. What could he do?

Firth thought he could only learn not to expect, anywhere out of the bounds of home, what he thought justice. He must, of course, try himself to be just to everybody; but he must make up his mind in school, as men have to do in the world, to be misunderstood—to be wrongly valued; to be blamed when he felt himself the injured one; and praised when he knew he did not deserve it.

"But it is so hard," said Hugh.

"And what do people leave home for but to learn hard lessons?"

"But still, if it were not for—"

"For what? Do you see any comfort under it?" asked Firth, fixing his eyes on Hugh.

Hugh nodded, without speaking.

"That One understands us who cannot be unjust!" whispered Firth. "I am glad you feel that."

"Even home would be bad enough without that," said Hugh. "And what would school be?"

"Or the world?" added Frith. "But do not get cross, and complain again. Leave that to those who have no comfort."

Hugh nodded again. Then he got down, and ran to tell Holt that he did not want a shilling from him, because he thought sixpence would be fairer.

Holt was glad to hear this at first; but he presently said that it did not much matter, for that he had no more chance of being able to pay sixpence than a shilling. His parents were in India, and his uncle never offered him any money. He knew indeed that his uncle had none to spare; for he had said in the boy's hearing, that it was hard on him to have to pay the school-bills (unless he might pay them in the produce of his farm), so long as it must be before he could be repaid from India. So Holt did not dare to ask for pocket-money; and for the hundredth time he sighed over his debt. He had almost left off hoping that Hugh, would excuse him altogether, though everybody knew that Hugh had five shillings in Mrs Watson's hands. This fact and Hugh's frequent applications to Lamb for payment, had caused an impression that Hugh was fond of money. It was not so; and yet the charge was not unfair. Hugh was ready to give if properly asked; but he did not relish, and could not bear with temper, the injustice of such a forced borrowing as had stripped him of his half-crown. He wanted his five shillings for presents for his family; and for these reasons, and not because he was miserly, he did not offer to excuse Holt's debt; which it would have been more generous to have done. Nobody could wish that he should excuse Lamb's.

"When are you going to your uncle's?" asked Holt. "I suppose you *are* going some day before Christmas."

"On Saturday, to stay till Sunday night," said Hugh.

"And Proctor goes too, I suppose?"

"Yes; of course, Phil goes too."

"Anybody else?"

"We are each to take one friend, just for Saturday, to come home at night."

"Oh? Then, you will take me. You said you would."

"Did I? That must have been a long time ago."

"But you did say so,—that, whenever you went, you would ask leave to take me."

"I don't remember any such thing. And I am going to take Dale this time. I have promised him."

Holt cried with vexation. Dale was always in his way. Hugh cared for nobody but Dale; but Dale should not go to Mr Shaw's till he had had his turn. He had been promised first, and he would go first. He would speak to Mrs Watson, and get leave to go and tell Mrs Shaw, and then he was sure Mr Shaw would let him go.

Hugh was very uncomfortable. He really could not remember having made this promise: but he could not be sure that he had not. He asked Holt if he thought he should like to be in people's way, to spoil the holiday by going where he was not wished for; but this sort of remonstrance did not comfort Holt at all. Hugh offered that he should have the very next turn, if he would give up now.

"I dare say! And when will that be? You know on Sunday it will want only nineteen days to the holidays; and you will not be going to your uncle's again this half-year. A pretty way of putting me off!"

Then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he cried,—

"But Proctor has to take somebody."

"Yes; Phil takes Tooke. They settled that a week ago."

"Oh! Can't you ask him to take me?"

"No; I shall not meddle with Phil. Besides, I am glad he has chosen Tooke. Tooke behaved well to me about the sponge that day. Tooke has some spirit."

This put Holt in mind of the worst of his adventures since he came to Crofton, and of all the miseries of being shunned as a tell-tale. He cried so bitterly as to touch Hugh's heart. As if thinking aloud, Hugh told him that he seemed very forlorn, and that he wished he would find a friend to be intimate with. This would make him so much happier as he had no idea of; as he himself had found since he had had Dale for a friend.

This naturally brought out a torrent of reproaches, which was followed by a hot argument; Holt insisting that Hugh ought to have been his intimate friend; and Hugh asking how he could make a friend of a boy who wanted spirit. They broke away from one another at last, Hugh declaring Holt to be unreasonable and selfish, and Holt thinking Hugh cruel and insulting.

Of course Mrs Watson would not hear of Holt's going to Mr Shaw, to ask for an invitation for Saturday. He was told he must wait till another time. It was no great consolation to Holt that on Sunday it would want only nineteen days to the holidays: for he was to remain at Crofton. He hoped to like the holidays better than school-days, and to be petted by Mrs Watson, and to sit by the fire, instead of being forced into the playground in all weathers; but still he could not look forward to Christmas with the glee which other boys felt.

Chapter Eight.

A Long Day.

Hugh, meantime, was counting the hours till Saturday. Perhaps, if the truth were known, so was Phil, though he was too old to acknowledge such a longing. But the climbing about the mill,—the play encouraged there by his uncle and the men,—his uncle's stories within doors, his aunt's good dinners,—the fire-side, the picture-books, the talk of home, altogether made up the greatest treat of the half-year. Phil had plenty of ways of passing the time. Hugh began a long letter home,—the very last letter, except the short formal one which should declare when the Christmas vacation should commence. Hugh meant to write

half the letter before Saturday, and then fill it up with an account of his visit to his uncle's.

The days were passed, however, when Hugh had the command of his leisure time, as on his arrival, when his hours were apt to hang heavy. He had long since become too valuable in the playground to be left to follow his own devices. As the youngest boy, he was looked upon as a sort of servant to the rest, when once it was found that he was quick and clever. Either as scout, messenger, or in some such capacity, he was continually wanted; and often at times inconvenient to himself. He then usually remembered what Mr Tooke had told him of his boy, when Tooke was the youngest,—how he bore things—not only being put on the high wall, but being well worked in the service of the older boys. Usually Hugh was obliging, but he could and did feel cross at times. He was cross on this Friday,—the day when he was so anxious to write his letter before going to his uncle's. On Saturday there would be no time. The early mornings were dark now; and after school he should have to wash and dress, and be off to his uncle's. On Friday then, his paper was ruled, and he had only to run across the playground to borrow Firth's penknife, and then nothing should delay his letter.

In that ran across the playground he was stopped. He was wanted to collect clean snow for the boys who were bent on finishing their snow-man while it would bind. He should be let off when he had brought snow enough. But he knew that by that time his fingers would be too stiff to hold his pen; and he said he did not choose to stop now. Upon this Lamb launched a snowball in his face. Hugh grew angry,—or, as his schoolfellows said, insolent. Some stood between him and the house, to prevent his getting home, while others promised to roll him in the snow till he yielded full submission. Instead of yielding, Hugh made for the orchard-wall, scrambled up it, and stood for the moment out of the reach of his enemies. He kicked down such a quantity of snow upon any one who came near, that he held all at bay for some little time. At last, however, he had disposed of all the snow within his reach, and they were pelting him thickly with snow-balls. It was not at any time very easy to stand upright, for long together, upon this wall, as the stones which capped it were rounded. Now, when the coping-stones were slippery after the frost, and Hugh nearly blinded with the shower of snow-balls, he could not keep his footing, and was obliged to sit astride upon the wall. This brought one foot within reach from below; and though Hugh kicked, and drew up his foot as far and as often as he could, so as not to lose his

balance, it was snatched at by many hands. At last, one hand kept its hold, and plenty more then fastened upon his leg. They pulled: he clung. In another moment, down he came, and the large, heavy coping-stone, loosened by the frost, came after him, and fell upon his left foot as he lay.

It was a dreadful shriek that he gave. Mrs Watson heard it in her store-room, and Mr Tooke in his study. Some labourers felling a tree in a wood, a quarter of a mile off, heard it, and came running to see what could be the matter. The whole school was in a cluster round the poor boy in a few seconds. During this time, while several were engaged in lifting away the stone, Tooke stooped over him, and said, with his lips as white as paper,—

"Who was it that pulled you,—that got the first hold of you? Was it I? O! Say it was not I."

"It was you," said Hugh. "But never mind! You did not mean it."—He saw that Tooke's pain was worse than his own, and he added, in a faint whisper,—

"Don't you tell, and then nobody will know. Mind you don't!"

One boy after another turned away from the sight of his foot, when the stone was removed. Tooke fainted, but, then, so did another boy who had nothing to do with the matter. Everybody who came up asked who did it; and nobody could answer. Tooke did not hear; and so many felt themselves concerned, that no one wished that any answer should be given.

"Who did it, my dear boy?" asked Firth, bending over him.

"Never mind!" was all Hugh could say. He groaned in terrible pain.

He must not lie there; but who could touch him? Firth did; and he was the right person, as he was one of the strongest. He made two boys pass their handkerchiefs under the leg, and sling it, without touching it; and he lifted Hugh, and carried him across his arms towards the house. They met Mr Tooke, and every person belonging to the household, before they reached the door.

"To my bed!" said the master, when he saw: and in an instant the gardener had his orders to saddle Mr Tooke's horse, and ride to London for an eminent surgeon: stopping by the way to

beg Mr and Mrs Shaw to come, and bring with them the surgeon who was their neighbour, Mr Annanby.

"Who did it?"

"Who pulled him down?" passed from mouth to mouth of the household.

"He won't tell,—noble fellow," cried Firth. "Don't ask him. Never ask him who pulled him down."

"You will never repent it, my dear boy," whispered Firth. Hugh tried to smile, but he could not help groaning again. There was a suppressed groan from some one else. It was from Mr Tooke. Hugh was sadly afraid he had, by some means, found out who did the mischief. But it was not so. Mr Tooke was quite wretched enough without that.

Everybody was very kind, and did the best that could be done. Hugh was held up on the side of Mr Tooke's bed, while Mrs Watson took off his clothes, cutting the left side of his trousers to pieces, without any hesitation. The master held the leg firmly while the undressing went on; and then poor Hugh was laid back, and covered up warm, while the foot was placed on a pillow, with only a light handkerchief thrown over it.

It was terrible to witness his pain; but Mr Tooke never left him all day. He chafed his hands, he gave him drink; he told him he had no doubt his mother would arrive soon; he encouraged him to say or do anything that he thought would give him ease.

"Cry, my dear," he said, "if you want to cry. Do not hide tears from me."

"I can't help crying," sobbed Hugh: "but it is not the pain,—not only the pain; it is because you are so kind!"

"Where *is* Phil?" he said at last.

"He is so very unhappy, that we think he had better not see you till this pain is over. When you are asleep, perhaps."

"Oh! When will that be?" and poor Hugh rolled his head on the pillow.

"George rides fast; he is far on his way by this time," said Mr Tooke. "And one or other of the surgeons will soon be here; and they will tell us what to do, and what to expect."

"Do tell Phil so,—will you?"

Mr Tooke rang the bell; and the message was sent to Phil, with Hugh's love.

"Will the surgeon hurt me much, do you think?" Hugh asked. "I will bear it. I only want to know."

"I should think you hardly could be in more pain than you are now," replied Mr Tooke. "I trust they will relieve you of this pain. I should not wonder if you are asleep to-night as quietly as any of us; and then you will not mind what they may have done to you."

Hugh thought he should mind nothing, if he could ever be asleep again.

He was soon asked if he would like to see his uncle and aunt, who were come. He wished to see his uncle; and Mr Shaw came up, with the surgeon. Mr Annanby did scarcely anything to the foot at present. He soon covered it up again, and said he would return in time to meet the surgeon who was expected from London. Then Hugh and his uncle were alone.

Mr Shaw told him how sorry the boys all were, and how they had come in from the playground at once, and put themselves under Firth, to be kept quiet; and that very little dinner had been eaten; and that, when the writing-master arrived, he was quite astonished to find everything so still, and the boys so spiritless: but that nobody told him till he observed how two or three were crying, so that he was sure something was the matter.

"Which? Who? Who is crying?" asked Hugh.

"Poor Phil, and I do not know who else,—not being acquainted with the rest."

"How glad I am that Dale had nothing to do with it!" said Hugh. "He was quite on the other side of the playground."

"They tell me below that I must not ask you how it happened."

"Oh, yes! You may. Everything except just who it was that pulled me down. So many got hold of me that nobody knows exactly who gave *the* pull, except myself and one other. He did not mean it; and I was cross about playing with them; and the

stone on the wall was loose or it would not have happened. O dear! O dear! Uncle, do you think it a bad accident?”

“Yes, my boy, a very bad accident.”

“Do you think I shall die? I never thought of that,” said Hugh. And he raised himself a little, but was obliged to lie back again.

“No; I do not think you will die.”

“Will they think so at home? Was that the reason they were sent to?”

“No: I have no doubt your mother will come to nurse you, and to comfort you: but—”

“To comfort me? Why, Mr Tooke said the pain would soon be over, he thought, and I should be asleep to-night.”

“Yes; but though the pain may be over, it may leave you lame. That will be a misfortune; and you will be glad of your mother to comfort you.”

“Lame!” said the boy. Then, as he looked wistfully in his uncle’s face, he saw the truth.

“Oh! Uncle, they are going to cut off my leg.”

“Not your leg, I hope, Hugh. You will not be quite so lame as that: but I am afraid you must lose your foot.”

“Was that what Mr Tooke meant by the surgeon’s relieving me of my pain?”

“Yes, it was.”

“Then it will be before night. Is it quite certain, uncle?”

“Mr Annanby thinks so. Your foot is too much hurt ever to be cured. Do you think you can bear it, Hugh?”

“Why, yes, I suppose so. So many people have. It is less than some of the savages bear. What horrid things they do to their captives,—and even to some of their own boys! And they bear it.”

“Yes; but you are not a savage.”

"But one may be as brave, without being a savage. Think of the martyrs that were burnt, and some that were worse than burnt! And they bore it."

Mr Shaw perceived that Hugh was either in much less pain now, or that he forgot everything in a subject which always interested him extremely. He told his uncle what he had read of the tortures inflicted by savages, till his uncle, already a good deal agitated, was quite sick: but he let him go on, hoping that the boy might think lightly in comparison of what he himself had to undergo. This could not last long, however. The wringing pain soon came back; and as Hugh cried, he said he bore it so very badly, he did not know what his mother would say if she saw him. She had trusted him not to fail; but really he could not bear this much longer.

His uncle told him that nobody had thought of his having such pain as this to bear: that he had often shown himself a brave little fellow; and he did not doubt that, when this terrible day was over, he would keep up his spirits through all the rest.

Hugh would have his uncle go down to tea. Then he saw a gown and shawl through the curtain, and started up; but it was not his mother yet. It was only Mrs Watson come to sit with him while his uncle had his tea.

Tea was over, and the younger boys had all gone up to bed, and the older ones were just going when there was a ring at the gate. It was Mrs Proctor; and with her the surgeon from London.

"Mother! Never mind, mother!" Hugh was beginning to say; but he stopped when he saw her face,—it was so very pale and grave. At least, he thought so; but he saw her only by fire-light; for the candle had been shaded from his eyes, because he could not bear it. She kissed him with a long, long kiss; but she did not speak.

"I wish the surgeon had come first," he whispered, "and then they would have had my foot off before you came. When *will* he come?"

"He is here,—they are both here."

"Oh, then, do make them make haste. Mr Tooke says I shall go to sleep afterwards. You think so? Then we will both go to sleep, and have our talk in the morning. Do not stay now,—this pain is

so bad,—I can't bear it well at all. Do go, now, and bid them make haste, will you?"

His mother whispered that she heard he had been a brave boy, and she knew he would be so still. Then the surgeons came up, and Mr Shaw. There was some bustle in the room, and Mr Shaw took his sister down-stairs, and came up again, with Mr Tooke.

"Don't let mother come," said Hugh.

"No, my boy, I will stay with you," said his uncle.

The surgeons took off his foot. As he sat in a chair, and his uncle stood behind him, and held his hands, and pressed his head against him, Hugh felt how his uncle's breast was heaving,—and was sure he was crying. In the very middle of it all, Hugh looked up in his uncle's face, and said,—

"Never mind, uncle! I can bear it."

He did bear it finely. It was far more terrible than he had fancied; and he felt that he could not have gone on a minute longer. When it was over, he muttered something, and Mr Tooke bent down to hear what it was. It was—

"I can't think how the Red Indians bear things so."

His uncle lifted him gently into bed, and told him that he would soon feel easy now.

"Have you told mother?" asked Hugh.

"Yes; we sent to her directly."

"How long did it take?" asked Hugh.

"You have been out of bed only a few minutes—seven or eight, perhaps."

"Oh, uncle, you don't mean really?"

"Really: but we know they seemed like hours to you. Now, your mother will bring you some tea. When you have had that, you will go to sleep: so I shall wish you good-night now."

"When will you come again?"

"Very often, till you come to me. Not a word more now. Good-night."

Hugh was half asleep when his tea came up, and quite so directly after he had drunk it. Though he slept a great deal in the course of the night, he woke often,—such odd feelings disturbed him! Every time he opened his eyes, he saw his mother sitting by the fire-side; and every time he moved in the least, she came softly to look. She would not let him talk at all till near morning, when she found that he could not sleep any more, and that he seemed a little confused about where he was,—what room it was, and how she came to be there by fire-light. Then she lighted a candle, and allowed him to talk about his friend Dale, and several school affairs; and this brought back gradually the recollection of all that had happened.

"I don't know what I have been about, I declare," said he, half laughing. But he was soon as serious as ever he was in his life, as he said, "But oh! Mother, tell me,—do tell me if I have let out who pulled me off the wall."

"You have not,—you have not indeed," replied she. "I shall never ask. I do not wish to know. I am glad you have not told; for it would do no good. It was altogether an accident."

"So it was," said Hugh; "and it would make the boy so unhappy to be pointed at! Do promise me, if I should let it out in my sleep, that you will never, never tell anybody."

"I promise you. And I shall be the only person beside you while you are asleep, till you get well. So you need not be afraid.—Now, lie still again."

She put out the light, and he did lie still for some time; but then he was struck with a sudden thought which made him cry out.

"O, mother, if I am so lame, I can never be a soldier or a sailor.—I can never go round the world!"

And Hugh burst into tears, now more really afflicted than he had been yet. His mother sat on the bed beside him, and wiped away his tears as they flowed, while he told her, as well as his sobs would let him, how long and how much he had reckoned on going round the world, and how little he cared for anything else in the future; and now this was just the very thing he should never be able to do! He had practised climbing ever since he could remember;—and now that was of no use;—he had practised marching, and now he should never march again.

When he had finished his complaint, there was a pause, and his mother said—

"Hugh, do you remember Richard Grant?"

"What,—the cabinet-maker? The man who carved so beautifully?"

"Yes. Do you remember— No, you could hardly have known: but I will tell you. He had planned a most beautiful set of carvings in wood for a chapel belonging to a nobleman's mansion. He was to be well paid,—his work was so superior; and he would be able to make his parents comfortable, as well as his wife and children. But the thing he most cared for was the honour of producing a noble work which would outlive him. Well, at the very beginning of his task, his chisel flew up against his wrist: and the narrow cut that it made,—not more than half an inch wide,—made his right-hand entirely useless for life. He could never again hold a tool;—his work was gone,—his business in life seemed over,—the support of the whole family was taken away—and the only strong wish Richard Grant had in the world was disappointed."

Hugh hid his face with his handkerchief, and his mother went on:

"You have heard of Huber."

"The man who found out so much about bees. Miss Harold read that account to us."

"Bees and ants. When Huber had discovered more than had ever been known before about bees and ants, and when he was sure he could learn more still, and was more and more anxious to peep and pry into their tiny homes, and their curious ways, Huber became blind."

Hugh sighed, and his mother went on:

"Did you ever hear of Beethoven? He was one of the greatest musical composers that ever lived. His great, his sole delight was in music. It was the passion of his life. When all his time and all his mind were given to music, he became deaf—perfectly deaf; so that he never more heard one single note from the loudest orchestra. While crowds were moved and delighted with his compositions, it was all silence to him."

Hugh said nothing.

“Now, do you think,” asked his mother,—and Hugh saw by the grey light that began to shine in, that she smiled—“do you think that these people were without a heavenly Parent?”

“O no! But were they all patient?”

“Yes, in their different ways and degrees. Would you say that they were hardly treated? Or would you rather suppose that their Father gave them something more and better to do than they had planned for themselves?”

“He must know best, of course: but it does seem hard that that very thing should happen to them. Huber would not have so much minded being deaf, perhaps; or that musical man being blind; or Richard Grant losing his foot, instead of his hand: for he did not want to go round the world.”

“No doubt their hearts often swelled within them at their disappointments: but I fully believe that they found very soon that God’s will was wiser than their wishes. They found, if they bore their trial well, that there was work for their hearts to do, far nobler than any work that the head can do through the eye, and the ear, and the hand. And they soon felt a new and delicious pleasure, which none but the bitterly disappointed can feel.”

“What is that?”

“The pleasure of rousing their souls to bear pain, and of agreeing with God silently, when nobody knows what is in their hearts. There is a great pleasure in the exercise of the body,—in making the heart beat, and the limbs glow, in a run by the sea-side, or a game in the playground; but this is nothing to the pleasure there is in exercising one’s soul in bearing pain,—in finding one’s heart glow with the hope that one is pleasing God.”

“Shall I feel that pleasure?”

“Often and often, I have no doubt,—every time that you can willingly give up your wish to be a soldier or a sailor,—or anything else that you have set your mind upon, if you can smile to yourself, and say that you will be content at home.—Well, I don’t expect it of you yet. I dare say it was long a bitter thing to Beethoven to see hundreds of people in raptures with his music, when he could not hear a note of it. And Huber—”

“But did Beethoven get to smile?”

"If he did, he was happier than all the fine music in the world could have made him."

"I wonder—O! I wonder if I ever shall feel so."

"We will pray to God that you may. Shall we ask Him now?"

Hugh clasped his hands. His mother kneeled beside the bed, and, in a very few words, prayed that Hugh might be able to bear his misfortune well, and that his friends might give him such help and comfort as God should approve.

"Now, my dear, you will sleep again," she said, as she arose.

"If you will lie down too, instead of sitting by the fire. Do, mother."

She did so; and they were soon both asleep.

Chapter Nine.

Crofton quiet.

The boys were all in the school-room in the grey of the morning;—no one late. Mr Tooke was already there. Almost every boy looked wistfully in the grave face of the master;—almost every one but his own son. He looked down; and it seemed natural: for his eyes were swollen with crying. He had been crying as much as Proctor: but, then, so had Dale.

"Your school-fellow is doing well," said Mr Tooke, in a low voice, which, however, was heard to the farthest end of the room. "His brother will tell you that he saw him quietly asleep; and I have just seen him so. He deserves to do well; for he is a brave little boy. He is the youngest of you; but I doubt whether there is a more manly heart among you all."

There was a murmur, as if everybody wished to agree to this. That murmur set Phil crying again.

"As to how this accident happened," continued the master, "I have only to say this. The coping-stone of the wall was loose,—had become loosened by the frost. Of that I am aware. But it would not,—it could not have fallen, if your school-fellow had not been pulled from the top of the wall. Several hands pulled

him,—as many as could get a hold. Whose these hands were, it would be easy to ascertain; and it would not be difficult to discover whose was the hand which first laid hold, and gave the rest their grasp. But—" How earnestly here did every one look for the next words!—"But your school-fellow considers the affair an accident,—says he himself was cross."

"No! No! We plagued him," cried many voices.

"Well! He is sure no one meant him any harm, and earnestly desires that no further inquiry may be made. For his part, nothing, he declares, shall ever induce him to tell who first seized him."

The boys were about to give a loud cheer, but stopped, for Hugh's sake, just in time. There was no want of signs of what they felt. There was no noise; but there were many tears.

"I do not think that a promise of impunity can be any great comfort to those concerned," continued Mr Tooke: "but such comfort as they can find in it, they may. Both from my wish to indulge one who has just sustained so great a misfortune, and because I think he is right, I shall never inquire,—never wish to know more than I do of the origin of this accident. His mother declares the same, on the part of both of his parents. I hope you will every one feel yourselves put upon honour, to follow my example."

Another general murmur, in sign of agreement.

"The only thing you can now do for your school-fellow," concluded the master, "is to be quiet throughout the day. As soon as he can be removed, he will be carried to Mr Shaw's. Till then, you will take care that he loses no rest through you,—Now, first class, come up."

While this class was up, Phil's neighbour began whispering; and the next boy leaned over to hear; and one or two came softly up behind: but, though they were busily engaged in question and answer, the master's stern voice was not heard (as usual when there was talking) to say "Silence there!" His class saw him looking that way, once or twice; but he took no notice. Phil had seen his brother, and was privileged to tell.

"So you saw him! Did you get a real good sight of him?"

"Yes. I stayed some time; half-an-hour, I dare say."

“What did he look like? Did he say anything?”

“Say anything!” cried Dale: “why, did you not hear he was asleep?”

“What did he look like, then?”

“He looked as he always does when he is asleep, as far as I could see. But we did not bring the light too near, for fear of waking him.”

“Did you hear—did anybody tell you anything about it?”

“Yes: my mother told me whatever I wanted to know.”

“What? What did she tell you?”

“She says it will not be so very bad a lameness as it might have been—as if he had not had his knee left. That makes a great difference. They make a false foot now, very light; and if his leg gets quite properly well, and we are not too much in a hurry, and we all take pains to help Hugh to practise walking carefully at first, he may not be very lame.”

“Oh! Then, it is not so bad,” said one, while Tooke, who was listening, gave a deep sigh of relief.

“Not so bad!” exclaimed Phil. “Why, he will never be so strong—so able and active as other men. He will never be able to take care of himself and other people. He will be so unlike other people always; and now, while he is a boy, he will never—”

The images of poor Hugh’s privations and troubles as a schoolboy were too much for Phil, and he laid down his head on his desk, to hide his grief. As for Tooke, he walked away, looking the picture of wretchedness.

“When will you see him again?” asked Dale, passing his arm round Phil’s neck.

“To-day, if he is pretty well. My mother promised me that.”

“Do you think you could get leave for me too? I would not make any noise, nor let him talk too much, if I might just see him.”

“I’ll see about it,” said Phil.

As Mrs Proctor was placing the pillows comfortably, for Hugh to have his breakfast, after he was washed, and the bed made nicely smooth, he yawned, and said he was sleepy still, and that he wondered what o'clock it was. His mother told him it was a quarter past ten.

"A quarter past ten! Why, how odd! The boys are half through school, almost, and I am only just awake!"

"They slept through the whole night, I dare say. You were awake a good many times; and you and I had some talk. Do you remember that? Or has it gone out of your head with your sound sleep?"

"No, no: I remember that," said Hugh. "But it was the oddest, longest night!—and yesterday too! To think that it is not a whole day yet since it all happened! Oh! Here comes my breakfast. What is it? Coffee!"

"Yes: we know you are fond of coffee; and so am I. So we will have some together."

"How comfortable!" exclaimed Hugh; for he was really hungry; which was no wonder, after the pain and exhaustion he had gone through. His state was like that of a person recovering from an illness—extremely ready to eat and drink, but obliged to be moderate.

When warmed and cheered by his coffee, Hugh gave a broad hint that he should like to see Phil, and one or two more boys—particularly Dale. His mother told him that the surgeon, Mr Annanby, would be coming soon. If he gave leave, Phil should come in, and perhaps Dale. So Hugh was prepared with a strong entreaty to Mr Annanby on the subject; but no entreaty was needed. Mr Annanby thought he was doing very well; and that he would not be the worse for a little amusement and a little fatigue this morning, if it did not go on too long. So Phil was sent for, when the surgeon was gone. As he entered, his mother went out to speak to Mr Tooke, and write home.

She then heard from Mr Tooke and from Firth and Dale, how strong was the feeling in Hugh's favour—how strong the sympathy for his misfortune throughout the school. Hugh had seen no tears from her; but she shed them now. She then earnestly entreated that Hugh might not hear what she had just been told. He felt no doubt of the kindness of his schoolfellows, and was therefore quite happy on that score. He was very young, and to a certain degree vain; and if this event went to

strengthen his vanity, to fill his head with selfish thoughts, it would be a misfortune indeed. The loss of his foot would be the least part of it. It lay with those about him to make this event a deep injury to him, instead of the blessing which all trials are meant by Providence eventually to be. They all promised that, while treating Hugh with the tenderness he deserved, they would not spoil the temper in which he had acted so well, by making it vain and selfish. There was no fear, meantime, of Phil's doing him any harm in that way; for Phil had a great idea of the privileges and dignity of seniority; and his plan was to keep down little boys, and make them humble; not being aware that to keep people down is not the way to make them humble, but the contrary. Older people than Phil, however, often fall into this mistake. Many parents do, and many teachers; and very many elder brothers and sisters.

Phil entered the room shyly, and stood by the fire, so that the bed-curtain was between him and Hugh.

"Are you there, Phil?" cried Hugh, pulling aside the curtain.

"Yes," said Phil; "how do you do this morning?"

"Oh, very well. Come here. I want to know ever so many things. Have you heard yet anything real and true about the new usher?"

"No," replied Phil. "But I have no doubt it is really Mr Crabbe who is coming, and that he will be here after Christmas. Why, Hugh, you look just the same as usual!"

"So I am just the same, except under this thing," pointing to the hoop, or basket, which was placed over his limb, to keep off the weight of the bed-clothes. "I am not hurt anywhere else, except this bruise;" and he showed a black bruise on his arm, such as almost any schoolboy can show, almost any day.

"That's nothing," pronounced Phil.

"The other was, though, I can tell you," declared Hugh.

"Was it very, very bad? Worse than you had ever fancied?"

"Oh! Yes. I could have screamed myself to death. I did not, though. Did you hear me, did anybody hear me call out?"

"I heard you—just outside the door there—before the doctors came."

"Ah! But not after, not while uncle was here. He cried so! I could not call out while was he crying so. Where were you when they were doing it?"

"Just outside the door there. I heard you once—only once; and that was not much."

"But how came you to be there? It was past bedtime. Had you leave to be up so late?"

"I did not ask it; and nobody meddled with me."

"Was anybody there with you?"

"Yes, Firth. Dale would not. He was afraid and he kept away."

"Oh! Is not he very sorry?"

"Of course. Nobody can help being sorry."

"Do they all seem sorry? What did they do? What do they say?"

"Oh! They are very sorry; you must know that."

"Anybody more than the rest?"

"Why some few of them cried; but I don't know that that shows them to be more sorry. It is some people's way to cry—and others not."

Hugh wished much to learn something about Tooke; but, afraid of showing what was in his thoughts, he went off to quite another subject.

"Do you know, Phil," said he, "you would hardly believe it, but I have never been half so miserable as I was the first day or two I came here? I don't care now, half so much, for all the pain, and for being lame, and— Oh! But I can never be a soldier or a sailor—I can never go round the world! I forgot that."

And poor Hugh hid his face in his pillow.

"Never mind!" said Phil, stooping over him very kindly. "Here is a long time before you; and you will get to like something else just as well. Papa wanted to be a soldier, remember, and could not; and he is as happy as ever he can be, now that he is a shop-keeper in London. Did you ever see anybody merrier than

my father is? I never did. Come! Cheer up, Hugh! You will be very happy somehow."

Phil kissed him: and when Hugh looked up in surprise, Phil's eyes were full of tears.

"Now I have a good mind to ask you," said Hugh, "something that has been in my mind ever since."

"Ever since when?"

"Ever since I came to Crofton. What could be the reason that you were not more kind to me then?"

"I! Not kind?" said Phil, in some confusion. "Was not I kind?"

"No. At least I thought not. I was so uncomfortable,—I did not know anybody, or what to do; and I expected you would show me, and help me. I always thought I could not have felt lonely with you here; and then when I came, you got out of my way, as if you were ashamed of me, and you did not help me at all; and you laughed at me."

"No; I don't think I did that."

"Yes, you did, indeed."

"Well, you know, little boys always have to shift for themselves when they go to a great school—"

"But why, if they have brothers there? That is the very thing I want to know. I think it is very cruel."

"I never meant to be cruel, of course. But—but—the boys were all ready to laugh at me about a little brother that was scarcely any better than a girl;—and consider how you talked on the coach, and what ridiculous hair you had,—and what a fuss you made about your money and your pocket,—and how you kept popping out things about Miss Harold, and the girls, and Susan."

"You *were* ashamed of me, then."

"Well, what wonder if I was?"

"And you never told me about all these things. You let me learn them all without any warning, or any help."

“To be sure. That is the way all boys have to get on. They must make their own way.”

“If ever little Harry comes to Crofton,” said Hugh, more to himself than to Phil, “I will not leave him in the lurch,—I will never be ashamed of him. Pray,” said he, turning quickly to Phil, “are you ashamed of me still?”

“Oh, no,” protested Phil. “You can shift for yourself,—you can play, and do everything like other boys, now. You—”

He stopped short, overcome with the sudden recollection that Hugh would never again be able to play like other boys,—to be like them in strength, and in shifting for himself.

“Ah! I see what you are thinking of,” said Hugh. “I am so afraid you should be ashamed of me again, when I come into the playground. The boys will quiz me;—and if you are ashamed of me—”

“Oh, no, no!” earnestly declared Phil. “There is nobody in the world that will quiz you;—or, if there is, they had better take care of me, I can tell them. But nobody will. You don’t know how sorry the boys are. Here comes Dale. He will tell you the same thing.”

Dale was quite sure that any boy would, from this time for ever, be sent to Coventry who should quiz Hugh for his lameness. There was not a boy now at Crofton who would not do anything in the world to help him.

“Why, Dale, how you have been crying!” exclaimed Hugh. “Is anything wrong in school? Can’t you manage your verses yet?”

“I’ll try that to-night,” said Dale, cheerfully. “Yes; I’ll manage them. Never mind what made my eyes red; only, if such a thing had happened to me, you would have cried,—I am sure of that.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Phil.

“Now, Proctor, you had better go,” said Dale. “One at a time is enough to-day; and I shall not stay long.”

Phil agreed, and actually shook hands with Hugh before he went.

“Phil is so kind to-day!” cried Hugh, with glee; “though he is disappointed of going to uncle Shaw’s on my account. And I

know he had reckoned on it. Now, I want to know one thing,—where did Mr Tooke sleep last night? For this is his bed."

Dale believed he slept on the sofa. He was sure, at least, that he had not taken off his clothes; for he had come to the door several times in the course of the night, to know how all was going on.

"Why, I never knew that!" cried Hugh. "I suppose I was asleep. Dale, what do you think is the reason that our fathers and mothers and people take care of us as they do?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, Agnes and I cannot make it out. When we were by the sea-side, mother took us a great way along the beach, to a place we did not know at all; and she bade us pick up shells, and amuse ourselves, while she went to see a poor woman that lived just out of sight. We played till we were quite tired; and then we sat down; and still she did not come. At last, we were sure that she had forgotten all about us; and we did not think she would remember us any more: and we both cried. Oh! How we did cry! Then a woman came along, with a basket at her back, and a great net over her arm: and she asked us what was the matter; and when we told her, she said she thought it was not likely that mother would forget us. And then she bade us take hold of her gown, one on each side, and she would try to take us to mother; and the next thing was mother came in sight. When the woman told her what we had said, they both laughed; and mother told us it was impossible that she should leave us behind. I asked Agnes afterwards why it was impossible; and she did not know; and I am sure she was as glad as I was to see mother come in sight. If she really never can forget us, what makes her remember us?"

Dale shook his head. He could not tell.

"Because," continued Hugh, "we can't do anything for anybody, and we give a great deal of trouble. Mother sits up very late, sometimes till near twelve, mending our things. There is that great basket of stockings she has to mend, once a fortnight! And papa works very hard to get money; and what a quantity he pays for our schooling, and our clothes, and everything!"

"Everybody would think it very shameful if he did not," suggested Dale. "If he let you go ragged and ignorant, it would be wicked."

"But why?" said Hugh, vehemently. "That is what I want to know. We are not worth anything. We are nothing but trouble. Only think what so many people did yesterday! My mother came a journey; and uncle and aunt Shaw came: and mother sat up all night; and Mr Tooke never went to bed,—and all about me! I declare I can't think why."

Dale felt as if he knew why; but he could not explain it. Mrs Proctor had heard much of what they were saying. She had come in before closing her letter to Mr Proctor, to ask whether Hugh wished to send any particular message home. As she listened, she was too sorry to feel amused. She perceived that she could not have done her whole duty to her children, if there could be such a question as this in their hearts—such a question discussed between them, unknown to her. She spoke now; and Hugh started, for he was not aware that she was in the room.

She asked both the boys why they thought it was that, before little birds are fledged, the parent birds bring them food, as often as once in a minute, all day long for some weeks. Perhaps no creatures can go through harder work than this; and why do they do it? For unfledged birds, which are capable of nothing whatever but clamouring for food, are as useless little creatures as can be imagined. Why does the cat take care of her little blind kitten with so much watchfulness, hiding it from all enemies till it can take care of itself. It is because love does not depend on the value of the creature loved—it is because love grows up in our hearts at God's pleasure, and not by our own choice; and it is God's pleasure that the weakest and the least useful and profitable should be the most beloved, till they become able to love and help in their turn.

"Is it possible, my dear," she said to Hugh, "that you did not know this,—you who love little Harry so much, and take such care of him at home? I am sure you never stopped to think whether Harry could do you any service, before helping him to play."

"No; but then—"

"But what?"

"He is such a sweet little fellow, it is a treat to look at him. Every morning when I woke, I longed to be up, and to get to him."

"That is, you loved him. Well: your papa and I love you all, in the same way. We get up with pleasure to our business—your

father to his shop, and I to my work-basket—because it is the greatest happiness in the world to serve those we love."

Hugh said nothing; but still, though pleased, he did not look quite satisfied.

"Susan and cook are far more useful to me than any of you children," continued his mother, "and yet I could not work early and late for them, with the same pleasure as for you."

Hugh laughed; and then he asked whether Jane was not now as useful as Susan.

"Perhaps she is," replied his mother; "and the more she learns and does, and the more she becomes my friend,—the more I respect her: but it is impossible to love her more than I did before she could speak or walk. There is some objection in your mind still, my dear. What is it?"

"It makes us of so much consequence,—so much more than I ever thought of,—that the minds of grown people should be busy about us."

"There is nothing to be vain of in that, my dear, any more than for young kittens, and birds just hatched. But it is very true that all young creatures are of great consequence; for they are the children of God. When, besides this, we consider what human beings are,—that they can never perish, but are to live for ever,—and that they are meant to become more wise and holy than we can imagine, we see that the feeblest infant is indeed a being of infinite consequence. This is surely a reason for God filling the hearts of parents with love, and making them willing to work and suffer for their children, even while the little ones are most unwise and unprofitable. When you and Agnes fancied I should forget you and desert you, you must have forgotten that you had another Parent who rules the hearts of all the fathers and mothers on earth."

Hugh was left alone to think this over, when he had given his messages home, and got Dale's promise to come again as soon as he could obtain leave to do so. Both the boys were warned that this would not be till to-morrow, as Hugh had seen quite company enough for one day. Indeed, he slept so much, that night seemed to be soon come.

Chapter Ten.

Though Mr Tooke was so busy from having no usher, he found time to come and see Hugh pretty often. He had a sofa moved into that room: and he carried Hugh, without hurting him at all, and laid him down there comfortably, beside the fire. He took his tea there, with Mrs Proctor; and he brought up his newspaper, and read from it anything which he thought would amuse the boy. He smiled at Hugh's scruple about occupying his room, and assured him that he was quite as well off in Mr Carnaby's room, except that it was not so quiet as this, and therefore more fit for a person in health than for an invalid. Mr Tooke not only brought up plenty of books from the school library, but lent Hugh some valuable volumes of prints from his own shelves.

Hugh could not look at these for long together. His head soon began to ache, and his eyes to be dazzled; for he was a good deal weakened. His mother observed also that he became too eager about views in foreign countries, and that he even grew impatient in his temper when talking about them.

"My dear boy," said she one evening, after tea, when she saw him in this state, and that it rather perplexed Mr Tooke, "if you remember your resolution, I think you will put away that book."

"O, mother!" exclaimed he, "you want to take away the greatest pleasure I have!"

"If it is a pleasure, go on. I was afraid it was becoming a pain."

Mr Tooke did not ask what this meant; but he evidently wished to know. He soon knew, for Hugh found himself growing more fidgety and more cross, the further he looked in the volume of Indian Views, till he threw himself back upon the sofa, and stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth, and stared at the fire, struggling, as his mother saw, to help crying. "I will take away the book,—shall I, my dear?"

"Yes, mother. O dear! I shall never keep my vow, I know."

Mrs Proctor told Mr Tooke that Hugh had made a resolution which she earnestly hoped he might be able to keep;—to bear cheerfully every disappointment and trouble caused by this accident, from the greatest to the least,—from being obliged to give up being a traveller by-and-by, to the shoemaker's wondering that he wanted only one shoe. Now, if looking at

pictures of foreign countries made him less cheerful, it seemed to belong to his resolution to give up that pleasure for the present. Hugh acknowledged that it did; and Mr Tooke, who was pleased at what he heard, carried away the Indian Views, and brought instead a very fine work on Trades, full of plates representing people engaged in every kind of trade and manufacture. Hugh was too tired to turn over any more pages to-night: but his master said the book might stay in the room now, and when Hugh was removed, it might go with him; and, as he was able to sit up more, he might like to copy some of the plates.

"Removed!" exclaimed Hugh.

His mother smiled, and told him that he was going on so well that he might soon now be removed to his uncle's.

"Where," said Mr Tooke, "you will have more quiet and more liberty than you can have here. Your brother, and any other boys you like, can run over to see you at any time; and you will be out of the noise of the playground."

"I wonder how it is there is so little noise from the playground here," said Hugh.

"It is because the boys have been careful to make no noise since your accident. We cannot expect them to put themselves under such restraint for long."

"O no, no! I had better go. But, mother, you— you — aunt Shaw is very kind, but—"

"I shall stay with you as long as you want me."

Hugh was quite happy.

"But how in the world shall I get there?" he presently asked. "It is two whole miles; and we can't lay my leg up in the gig: besides its being so cold."

His mother told him that his uncle had a very nice plan for his conveyance. Mr Annanby approved of it, and thought he might be moved the first sunny day.

"What, to-morrow?"

"Yes, if the sun shines."

Mr Tooke unbolted the shutter, and declared that it was such a bright starry evening that he thought to-morrow would be fine.

The morning was fine; and during the very finest part of it came Mr Shaw. He told Hugh that there was a good fire blazing at home in the back room that looked into the garden, which was to be Hugh's. From the sofa by the fire-side one might see the laurustinus on the grass-plot,—now covered with flowers: and when the day was warm enough to let him lie in the window, he could see the mill, and all that was going on round it.

Hugh liked the idea of all this: but he still looked anxious.

"Now tell me," said his uncle, "what person in all the world you would like best for a companion?"

"In all the world!" exclaimed Hugh. "Suppose I say the Great Mogul!"

"Well; tell us how to catch him, and we will try. Meantime, you can have his picture. I believe we have a pack of cards in the house."

"But do you mean really, uncle,—the person I should like best in all the world,—out of Crofton?"

"Yes; out with it!"

"I should like Agnes best," said Hugh, timidly.

"We thought as much. I am glad we were right. Well, my boy, Agnes is there."

"Agnes there! Only two miles off! How long will she stay?"

"O, there is no hurry about that. We shall see when you are well what to do next."

"But will she stay till the holidays?"

"O yes, longer than that, I hope."

"But then she will not go home with me for the holidays?"

"Never mind about the holidays now. Your holidays begin to-day. You have nothing to do but to get well now, and make yourself at home at my house, and be merry with Agnes. Now

shall we go, while the sun shines? Here is your mother all cloaked up in her warm things."

"O, mother! Agnes is come," cried Hugh.

This was no news; for it was his mother who had guessed what companion he would like to have. She now showed her large warm cloak, in which Hugh was to be wrapped; and his neck was muffled up in a comforter.

"But how am I to go?" asked Hugh, trembling with this little bustle.

"Quietly in your bed," said his uncle. "Come, I will lift you into it."

And his uncle carried him down-stairs to the front door, where two of Mr Shaw's men stood with a litter, which was slung upon poles, and carried like a sedan-chair. There was a mattress upon the litter, on which Hugh lay as comfortably as on a sofa. He said it was like being carried in a palanquin in India,—if only there was hot sunshine, and no frost and snow.

Mr Tooke, and Mrs Watson, and Firth shook hands with Hugh, and said they should be glad to see him back again: and Mr Tooke added that some of the boys should visit him pretty often till the breaking-up. Nobody else was allowed to come quite near; but the boys clustered at that side of the playground, to see as much as they could. Hugh waved his hand; and every boy saw it; and in a moment every hat and cap was off, and the boys gave three cheers,—the loudest that had ever been heard at Crofton. The most surprising thing was that Mr Tooke cheered, and Mr Shaw too. The men looked as if they would have liked to set down the litter, and cheer too: but they did not quite do that. They only smiled as if they were pleased.

There was one person besides who did not cheer. Tooke stood apart from the other boys, looking very sad. As the litter went down the by-road, he began to walk away; but Hugh begged the men to stop, and called to Tooke. Tooke turned: and when Hugh beckoned, he forgot all about bounds, leaped the paling, and came running. Hugh said,—

"I have been wanting to see you so! But I did not like to ask for you particularly."

"I wish I had known that."

“Come and see me,—do,” said Hugh. “Come the very first, wont you?”

“If I may.”

“Oh, you may, I know.”

“Well, I will, thank you. Good-bye.”

And on went the litter, with Mrs Proctor and Mr Shaw walking beside it. The motion did not hurt Hugh at all; and he was so warmly wrapped up, and the day so fine, that he was almost sorry when the two miles were over. And yet there was Agnes out upon the steps; and she sat beside him on the sofa in his cheerful room, and told him that she had nothing to do but to wait on him, and play with him. She did not tell him yet that she must learn directly to nurse him, and, with her aunt’s help, fill her mother’s place, because her mother was much wanted at home: but this was in truth one chief reason for her coming.

Though there was now really nothing the matter with Hugh—though he ate, drank, slept, and gained strength—his mother would not leave him till she saw him well able to go about.

The carpenter soon came, with some crutches he had borrowed for Hugh to try; and when they were sure of the right length, Hugh had a new pair. He found it rather nervous work at first, using them; and he afterwards laughed at the caution with which he began. First, he had somebody to lift him from his seat, and hold him till he was firm on his crutches. Then he carefully moved forwards one crutch at a time, and then the other; and he put so much strength into it, that he was quite tired when he had been once across the room and back again. Every stumble made him shake all over. He made Agnes try; and he was almost provoked to see how lightly she could hop about; but then, as he said, she could put a second foot down to save herself, whenever she pleased. Every day, however, walking became easier to him; and he even discovered, when accidentally left alone, and wanting something from the opposite end of the room, that he could rise, and set forth by himself, and be independent. And in one of these excursions it was that he found the truth of what Agnes had told him—how much easier it was to move both crutches together. When he showed his mother this, she said she thought he would soon learn to do with only one.

Hugh found himself subject to very painful feelings sometimes—such as no one quite understood, and such as he feared no one

was able to pity as they deserved. A surprise of this sort happened to him the evening before his father was to come to see him, and to fetch away his mother.

It was the dark hour in the afternoon—the hour when Mrs Proctor and her children enjoyed every day a quiet talk, before Mr Shaw came to carry Hugh into his aunt's parlour to tea. Nothing could be merrier than Hugh had been; and his mother and Agnes were chatting, when they thought they heard a sob from the sofa. They spoke to Hugh, and found that he was indeed crying bitterly.

"What is it, my dear?" said his mother. "Agnes, have we said anything that could hurt him?"

"No, no," sobbed Hugh. "I will tell you presently."

And presently he told them that he was so busy listening to what they said, that he forgot everything else, when he felt as if something had got between two of his toes; unconsciously he put his hand down; and his foot was not there! Nothing could be plainer than the feeling in his toes: and, then, when he put out his hand, and found nothing, it was so terrible—it startled him so.

It was a comfort to him to find that his mother knew all about this. She came and kneeled beside his sofa, and told him that many persons who had lost a limb considered this odd feeling the most painful thing they had to bear for some time; but that, though the feeling would return occasionally through life, it would cease to be painful. When he had become so used to do without his foot as to leave off wanting or wishing for it, he would perhaps make a joke of the feeling, instead of being disappointed. At least she knew that some persons did so who had lost a limb.

This did not comfort Hugh much, for every prospect had suddenly become darkened. He said he did not know how he should bear his misfortune;—he was pretty sure he could not bear it. It seemed so long already since it had happened! And when he thought of the long long days, and months, and years, to the end of his life, and that he should never run and play, and never be like other people, and never able to do the commonest things without labour and trouble, he wished he was dead. He had rather have died.

Agnes thought he must be miserable indeed, if he could venture to say this to his mother. She glanced at her mother's face; but

there was no displeasure there. Mrs Proctor said this feeling was very natural. She had felt it herself, under smaller misfortunes than Hugh's; but she had found that, though the prospect appears all strewn with troubles, they come singly, and are not worth minding, after all. She told Hugh that, when she was a little girl, very lazy—fond of her bed—fond of her book—and not at all fond of washing and dressing—

"Why, mother, you!" exclaimed Hugh.

"Yes; that was the sort of little girl I was. Well, I was in despair, one day, at the thought that I should have to wash, and clean my teeth, and brush my hair, and put on every daily article of dress every morning, as long as I lived. There was nothing I disliked so much; and yet it was the thing that must be done every day of my whole life."

"Did you tell anybody?" asked Hugh.

"No; I was ashamed to do that: but I remember I cried. You see how it turns out. Grown people, who have got to do everything by habit, so easily as not to think about it, wash and dress every morning, without ever being weary of it. We do not consider so much as once a year what we are doing at dressing-time, though at seven years old it is a very laborious and tiresome affair to get ready for breakfast."

"It is the same about writing letters," observed Agnes. "The first letter I ever wrote was to Aunt Shaw; and it took so long, and was so tiresome, that, when I thought of all the exercises I should have to write for Miss Harold, and all the letters that I must send to my relations when I grew up, I would have given everything I had in the world not to have learned to write. Oh! How I pitied papa, when I saw sometimes the pile of letters that were lying to go to the post!"

"And how do you like corresponding with Phil now?"

Agnes owned, with blushes, that she still dreaded the task for some days before, and felt particularly gay when it was done. Her mother believed that, if infants could think and look forward, they would be far more terrified with the prospect of having to walk on their two legs all their lives, than lame people could be at having to learn the art in part over again. Grown people are apt to doubt whether they can learn a new language, though children make no difficulty about it: the reason of which is, that grown people see at one view the whole labour, while children do not look beyond their daily task. Experience,

however, always brings relief. Experience shows that every effort comes at its proper time, and that there is variety or rest in the intervals. People who have to wash and dress every morning have other things to do in the after part of the day; and, as the old fable tells us, the clock that has to tick, before it is worn out, so many millions of times, as it perplexes the mind to think of, has exactly the same number of seconds to do it in; so that it never has more work on its hands than it can get through. So Hugh would find that he could move about on each separate occasion, as he wanted; and practice would, in time, enable him to do it without any more thought than it now cost him to put all the bones of his hands in order, so as to carry his tea and bread-and-butter to his mouth.

"But that is not all—nor half what I mean," said Hugh. "No, my dear; nor half what you will have to make up your mind to bear. You will have a great deal to bear, Hugh. You resolved to bear it all patiently, I remember: but what is it that you dread the most?"

"Oh! All manner of things. I can never do things like other people."

"Some things. You can never play cricket, as every Crofton boy would like to do. You can never dance at your sisters' Christmas parties."

"Oh! Mamma!" cried Agnes, with tears in her eyes, and the thought in her mind that it was cruel to talk so.

"Go on! Go on!" cried Hugh, brightening. "You know what I feel, mother; and you don't keep telling me, as Aunt Shaw does (and even Agnes sometimes), that it wont signify much, and that I shall not care, and all that; making out that it is no misfortune hardly, when I know what it is, and they don't."

"That is a common way of trying to give comfort, and it is kindly meant," said Mrs Proctor. "But those who have suffered much themselves know a better way. The best way is not to deny any of the trouble or the sorrow, and not to press on the sufferer any comforts which he cannot now see and enjoy. If comforts arise, he will enjoy them as they come."

"Now then, go on," said Hugh. "What else?"

"There will be little checks and mortifications continually—when you see boys leaping over this, and climbing that, and playing at the other, while you must stand out, and can only look on.

And some people will pity you in a way you don't like; and some may even laugh at you."

"O mamma!" exclaimed Agnes.

"I have seen and heard children in the street do it," replied Mrs Proctor. "This is a thing almost below notice; but I mentioned it while we were reckoning up our troubles."

"Well, what else?" said Hugh.

"Sooner or later, you will have to follow some way of life, determined by this accident, instead of one that you would have liked better. But we need not think of this yet:—not till you have become quite accustomed to your lameness."

"Well, what else?"

"I must ask you now. I can think of nothing more; and I hope there is not much else; for indeed I think here is quite enough for a boy—or any one else—to bear."

"I will bear it, though,—you will see."

"You will find great helps. These misfortunes, of themselves, strengthen one's mind. They have some advantages too. You will be a better scholar for your lameness, I have no doubt. You will read more books, and have a mind richer in thoughts. You will be more beloved;—not out of mere pity; for people in general will soon leave off pitying you, when once you learn to be active again; but because you have kept faith with your schoolfellows, and shown that you can bear pain. Yes, you will be more loved by us all; and you yourself will love God more for having given you something to bear for his sake."

"I hope so,—I think so," said Hugh. "O mother! I may be very happy yet."

"Very happy; and, when you have once made up your mind to everything, the less you think and speak about it, the happier you will be. It is very right for us now, when it is all new, and strange, and painful, to talk it well over; to face it completely; but when your mind is made up, and you are a Crofton boy again, you will not wish to speak much of your own concerns, unless it be to me, or to Agnes, sometimes, when your heart is full."

"Or to Dale, when you are far off."

"Yes,—to Dale, or some one friend at Crofton. But there is only one Friend that one is quite sure to get strength from,—the same who has given strength to all the brave people that ever lived, and comfort to all sufferers. When the greatest of all sufferers wanted relief, what did He do?"

"He went by Himself, and prayed," said Agnes.

"Yes, that is the way," observed Hugh, as if he knew by experience.

Mr Shaw presently came, to say that tea was ready.

"I am too big a baby to be carried now," cried Hugh, gaily. "Let me try if I cannot go alone."

"Why,—there is the step at the parlour-door," said Mr Shaw, doubtfully. "At any rate, stop till I bring a light."

But Hugh followed close upon his uncle's heels, and was over the step before his aunt supposed he was half way across the hall. After tea, his uncle and he were so full of play, that the ladies could hardly hear one another speak till Hugh was gone to bed, too tired to laugh any more.

Chapter Eleven.

Domestic Manners.

After Mr Proctor had come and was gone, and Mrs Proctor was gone with him, Hugh began to wonder why Tooke had never paid the visit he had promised. Several boys had called; some to thank Hugh for balls that he had quilted; some to see how he got on; and some to bring him Crofton news. Mr Tooke had fastened his horse up at the door, in passing, and stepped in for a few minutes, two or three times a week: but it was now within six days of the holidays, and the one Hugh most wished to see had not appeared. His uncle observed his wistful look when the door-bell rang, and drew his conclusions. He said, on the Wednesday before the breaking-up, that he was going to drive past the Crofton school; that it was such a fine day that he thought Hugh might go with him, and perhaps they might persuade some one to come home to dinner with them.

Hugh had never enjoyed the open air more than during this drive. He had yet much to learn about the country, and it was all as beautiful as it was new. His uncle pointed out to him the fieldfares wheeling in flocks over the fallows; and the rabbits in the warren, scampering away with their little white tails turned up; and the robin hopping in the frosty pathway; and the wild ducks splashing among the reeds in the marshes. They saw the cottagers' children trying to collect snow enough from the small remains of the drifts to make snow-balls, and obliged to throw away the dirty snow that would melt, and would not bind. As they left the road, and turned through a copse, because Mr Shaw had business with Mr Sullivan's gamekeeper, a pheasant flew out, whirring, from some ferns and brambles, and showed its long tail-feathers before it disappeared over the hedge. All these sights were new to Hugh: and all, after pain and confinement, looked beautiful and gay.

Mr Shaw could not stop for Hugh to get out at Crofton; so, when his arrival was seen, the boys were allowed to go out of bounds, as far as the gig, to speak to their school-fellow. Mr Shaw asked Tooke to mount, and go home with them for the day; and Tooke was so pleased,—so agreeably surprised to see Hugh look quite well and merry, that he willingly ran off to ask leave, and to wash his face, and change his jacket. When he had jumped in, and Hugh had bidden the rest good-bye, a sudden shyness came over his poor conscious visitor: and it was not lessened by Mr Shaw telling Tooke that he did not do credit to Crofton air,—so puny as he seemed: and that he looked at that moment more like one that had had a bad accident than Hugh did. When Mr Shaw perceived how the boy's eyes filled with tears in an instant, he probably thought within himself that Tooke was sadly weak-spirited, and altogether more delicate than he had been aware of.

Hugh was full of questions about Crofton matters, however; and long before they reached Mr Shaw's, they were chattering as busily as possible. But then it was all spoiled to Tooke again by seeing Hugh lifted out, and his crutches brought to him, and Agnes ready to take his hat and cloak, instead of his being able to run about, doing everything for himself.

The sofa had been left in Hugh's room, and there was a fire there every afternoon, for him and Agnes, that their aunt might have the parlour to herself till tea-time. The three young people went therefore to this room after dinner. Agnes felt a little uncomfortable, as she always did when any Crofton boys came. They had so much to say to each other of things that she did

not understand, and so very little to say to her, that she continually felt as if she was in the way. When she proposed, as usual, that Hugh should go through his exercises in walking and running (for she was indefatigable in helping him to learn to walk well, and superintended his practice every afternoon), he refused hastily and rather rudely. Of course, she could not know that he had a reason for wishing not to show off his lameness before Tooke; and she thought him unkind. He might indeed have remembered to ask her before to say nothing this afternoon about his exercises. She took out her work, and sat down at some distance from the boys; but they did not get on. It was very awkward. At last, the boys' eyes met, and they saw that they should like to talk freely, if they could.

"Agnes," said Hugh, "cannot you go somewhere, and leave us alone?"

"I hardly know where I can go," replied Agnes. "I must not disturb aunt; and there is no fire anywhere else."

"O, I am sure aunt won't mind, for this one afternoon. You can be still as a mouse; and she can doze away, as if nobody was there."

"I can be as still as a mouse here," observed Agnes. "I can take my work to that farthest window; and if you whisper, I shall not hear a word you say. Or, if I do hear a word, I will tell you directly. And you will let me come, now and then, and warm myself, if I find I cannot hold my needle any longer."

"No, no; that won't do. We can't talk so. Do just go, and see whether aunt cannot let you be there for this one afternoon."

Agnes did not like to refuse anything to Hugh: but she hesitated to take such a bold step as this. In his eagerness, Hugh requested the same favour of Tooke; but Tooke, more anxious even than Agnes to oblige, had not courage for such an errand. Hugh snatched his crutches, and declared he would go himself. But now Agnes gave way. She gathered up her work, and left the room. Hugh little imagined where she went, this cold, darkening December afternoon. She went to her own room, put on her cloak, and walked up and down till tea was ready, without fire or candle, and not very happy in her mind.

Meanwhile the boys basked before a glowing fire. Tooke began directly to open his full heart.

"Was that true that your sister said at dinner, about your always longing so to come to Crofton!"

"Yes."

"How sorry you must be that you came! How you must wish that you had never seen me!"

"I knew that there would be things to bear, whenever I came; and particularly while I was the youngest. Your father told me that: and one of the things that made me want to come more than ever was his telling me how you bore things when you were the youngest—being set on the top of that wall, and so on."

"Indeed, indeed, I never meant to hurt you when I pulled your foot—I suppose you are quite sure that it was I that gave the first pull? Are you?"

"Why, yes; I am sure of that; and so are you: but I know very well that you meant no harm; and that is the reason I would not tell. After what you did about the sponge, I could not think you meant any harm to me."

Tooke could not remember anything about a sponge; and when he was told, he thought nothing of it. He went on—

"Do you think you shall never tell anybody, as long as you live, who pulled you first?"

"Never," said Hugh, "unless I tell it in my sleep; and that is not likely, for I never think about it in the daytime,—or scarcely ever; and when I can run about again, I dare say I shall never think of it at all."

"But will you ever run about?"

"O yes! Finely, you will see. I shall begin first with a little stick-leg, very light. Mother is going to send some for me to try. When I am a man, I shall have one that will look like a real foot; but that will not be so light as the one you will see me with after the holidays. But you do not half know what I can do now, with my crutches. Here, I will show you."

As he flourished about, and played antics, Agnes heard the pit-pat of his crutches, and she thought she might as well have been there, if they had told all their secrets, and had got to play. But the noise did not last long, for Hugh's performances

did not make Tooke very merry; and the boys sat down quietly again.

"Now, I'll tell you what," said Tooke. "I am a bigger and stronger boy than you, without considering this accident I'll take care of you all the time you are at Crofton: and always afterwards, if I can. Mind you that. If anybody teases you, you call me,—that's all. Say you will."

"Why," said Hugh, "I had rather take care of myself. I had rather make no difference between you and everybody else."

"There now! You don't forgive me, after all."

"I do,—upon my word, I do. But why should I make any difference between you and the rest, when you did not mean me any harm,—any more than they? Besides, it might make people suspect."

"Well, let them. Sometimes I wish," continued Tooke, twisting himself about in the uneasiness of his mind, "sometimes I wish that everybody knew now. They say murderers cannot keep their secret. They are sure to tell, when they cannot bear it any longer."

"That is because of their consciences," said Hugh. "But you are not guilty of anything, you know. I am sure I can keep a secret easily enough, when I am not to blame in it."

"Yes! You have shown that. But—"

"Come! Don't let us talk any more about that—only just this. Has anybody accused you? Because I must know,—I must be on my guard."

"Nobody has said a word, because my father put us all upon honour never to mention it: but I always feel as if all their eyes were upon me all day,—and sometimes in the night."

"Nonsense! I don't believe anybody has pitched on you particularly. And when school opens again, all their eyes will be on me, to see how I manage. But I don't mean to mind that. Anybody may stare that likes."

Hugh sighed, however, after saying this; and Tooke was silent. At length he declared,—

"Whatever you say against it, I shall always take your part: and you have only to ask me, and I will always run anywhere, and do anything for you. Mind you that."

"Thank you," said Hugh. "Now tell me about the new usher; for I dare say you know more than the other boys do. Holt and I shall be under him altogether, I suppose."

"Yes: and you will be well off, by what I hear. He is as little like Mr Carnaby as need be."

All the rest of the afternoon was taken up with stories of Mr Carnaby and other ushers, so that the boys were surprised when the maid came to tell them that tea was ready.

Agnes was making tea. Hugh was so eager to repeat to his uncle some of the good stories that he had just heard, that he did not observe, as his aunt did, how red his sister's fingers were, and how she shivered still.

"My dear," said Mrs Shaw, "you have let these boys keep you away from the fire."

"Yes, aunt; never mind! I shall be warm enough presently."

"But you should not allow it, Agnes. How are they ever to learn manners, if they are not made to give way to young ladies while they are young? Boys are sure to be rude enough, at any rate. Their sisters should know better than to spoil them."

While poor Agnes' hardships were ending with a lecture, Hugh was chattering away, not at all aware that he had treated his sister much as Phil had treated him on his going to Crofton. If any one had told him that he was tyrannical, he would have been as much surprised as he had been at Phil's tyranny over him. He did not know indeed that his sister had been in the cold and in the dark; but he might have felt that he had used her with a roughness which is more painful to a loving heart than cold and darkness are to the body.

Chapter Twelve.

Holt and his Dignity.

There was no reason now why Hugh should not go to church. He and his crutches went between his uncle and aunt in the gig one way, and between his uncle and Agnes home again; and he could walk up the aisle quite well. He had been pleased at the idea of attending church again, and had never thought of the pain of being stared at for his lameness. This pain came upon him as he entered the church; and as he went up towards his uncle's pew, and saw the crowd of Crofton boys all looking at him, and some of the poor people turning their heads as he passed, to observe how he got on, he felt covered with confusion, and wished that he had waited one more Sunday, when the Crofton boys would have been all gone, and there would have been fewer eyes to mark his infirmity. But better thoughts soon arose, and made him ashamed of his false shame; and before the service was over, he felt how trifling is any misfortune while we are friends with God, in comparison with the least wrong-doing which sets us at a distance from him. He could not but feel after church that he had rather, a thousand times, be as he was than be poor Lamb, who slunk away from him, and hid himself behind the other boys,—his mind sore and troubled, no doubt, about his debt, and his cheating transaction, so long ago. Hugh asked some of the boys to bring up Lamb, to shake hands before parting for the holidays; but he would not come, and wriggled himself out of sight. Then Hugh recollected that he could forgive Lamb as well without Lamb's knowing it; and he let him alone.

Then there was Holt. He and Holt had parted on uneasy terms; and Holt now looked shy and uncomfortable. Hugh beckoned to him, and asked him whether he was really to remain at Crofton all the holidays.

"Yes," said Holt. "I am the only one not going home, unless you are to stay hereabouts. Even Tooke is to be at his uncle's in London. When do you go home?"

"Not quite yet;—not at the beginning of the holidays," said Hugh, hesitating, and looking up at his uncle. For, in truth, he did not know exactly what was planned for him, and had been afraid to ask.

His uncle said, very kindly, that he was not going to part with Hugh till school opened again. He would recover his full strength better in the country; and his aunt had promised his parents that he should be a stout boy again by the time he was wanted at Crofton.

This was what Hugh had dreaded to hear; and when he thought that he should not see his parents, nor little Harry, for so many months, his heart sank. But he was still in the church; and perhaps the place helped him to remember his mother's expectation that he should not fail, and his own resolution to bear cheerfully whatever troubles his misfortune brought upon him, from the greatest to the least. So when he heard his uncle saying to Holt that he should ask Mr Tooke to let him come and spend two or three weeks at his house, he said so heartily that he hoped Holt would come, that Holt felt that whatever discontent had been between them was forgiven and forgotten.

Phil went home, of course; and when Holt arrived at Mr Shaw's, Agnes also returned to London, that she might see something of Phil. Then the two boys were glad to be together, though Hugh would rather have had his dear friend Dale for a companion; and Holt knew that this was the case. Yet Hugh saw, and was glad to see, that Holt was improved. He had plucked up some spirit, and was more like other lads, though still, by his own account, too much like a timid, helpless foreigner among the rough Crofton boys.

All the boys had some lessons to prepare in the holidays. Every one who had ever written a theme had a theme to write now. Every boy who could construe had a good piece of Latin to prepare; and all had either Latin or English verses to learn by heart. Mrs Shaw made a point of her young visitors sitting down every morning after breakfast to their business; and Hugh was anxious to spare no pains, this time, about his theme, that, if he was to be praised, he might deserve it. He saw that Holt could not fix his attention well, either upon work or play; and one morning, when Hugh was pondering how, without knowing anything of history, he should find a modern example to match well with his ancient one (which he had picked up by chance), Holt burst upon his meditation with—

"I have a good mind to tell you what has been upon my mind this ever so long."

"Wait a minute," said Hugh. "I must find my example first."

No example could he find, to his satisfaction, this day. He gave it up till to-morrow, and then asked Holt what was on his mind. But Holt now drew back, and did not think he could tell. This made Hugh press; and Hugh's pressing looked like sympathy, and gave Holt courage: so that the thing came out at last. Holt was very miserable, for he was deep in debt, and the boys

never let him alone about it; and he did not see how he should ever pay, as nobody was likely to give him any money.

"Remember, it is only sixpence that you owe me—not a shilling," said Hugh.

Holt sighed. Perhaps he had hoped that Hugh would excuse him altogether. He explained that this sixpence was not all, nor the chief part. He told that, when the whole school was on the heath, one Saturday, they had seen a balloon rising at a distance, and some boys began betting about what direction it would move in when it ceased to rise perpendicularly. The betting spread till the boys told him he must bet, or he would be the only one left out, and would look like a shabby fellow.

"And you did?" exclaimed Hugh. "How silly!"

"You would have done it, if you had been there."

"No: I should not."

"Yes, you would. Or, if you had not, it would have been because of— I know what."

"Because of what, pray?"

"Because of something the boys say about you. They say you are very fond of money."

"I! Fond of money! I declare I never heard of such a thing."

"Well, you know you made a great fuss about that half-crown."

"As if it was about the money!" cried Hugh. "I should not have cared a bit if my uncle had asked me for it back again the next day. It was the being cheated. That was the thing. What a shame—"

"By-the-by, did your uncle ever ask what you did with that half-crown?"

"No; but he will next week, at the January fair. He will be sure to ask then. What a shame of the boys to say so, when I forgave—"

He remembered, just in time, that he had better not boast, or speak aloud, of having forgiven Lamb his debt in secret. He resolved that he would not say another word, but let the boys

see that he did not care for money for its own sake. They were all wrong, but he would be above noticing it; and, besides, he really had been very anxious about his half-crown, and they had only mistaken the reason.

"How much did you bet on the balloon?" he inquired of Holt.

"A shilling; and I lost."

"Then you owe eighteen-pence."

"But that is not all. I borrowed a shilling of Meredith to pay school-fines—"

"What for?"

"Chiefly for leaving my books about. Meredith says I promised to pay him before the holidays; but I am sure I never did. He twitted me about it, so that I declare I would have fought him, if I could have paid him first."

"That's right," exclaimed Hugh. "Why, Holt, what a different fellow you are! You never used to talk of fighting."

"But this fellow Meredith plagued me so! If it had not been for that shilling, I would have knocked him down. Well, here is half-a-crown altogether; and how am I ever to get half-a-crown?"

"Cannot you ask your uncle?"

"No; you know I can't. You know he complains about having to pay the bills for me before my father can send the money from India."

"I suppose it would take too long to ask your father. Yes; of course it would. There would be another holidays before you could have an answer; and almost another still. I wonder what uncle Shaw would say. He is very kind always, but it might set him asking—"

"And what should I do, staying here, if he should be angry and refuse? What should I do every day at dinner?"

"I know what I would do?" said Hugh, decidedly. "I would tell Mr Tooke all about it, and ask him for half-a-crown."

"Mr Tooke? Oh! I dare not."

"I dare,—in holiday-time. He is your master,—next to being your father, while your father is so far away. You had better ask Mr Tooke, to be sure."

"What go to Crofton, and speak to him? I really want not to be a coward,—but I never could go and tell him."

"Write him a letter, then. Yes: that is the way. Write a letter, and I will get one of my uncle's men to carry it, and wait for an answer: and then you will not be long in suspense, at any rate."

"I wish I dare!"

Holt was not long in passing from wishing to daring. He wrote a letter, which Hugh thought would do, though he rather wished Holt had not mentioned him as instigating the act. This was the letter:

> "The Mill, *January 6th*.
>
> "Dear Sir,
>
> "I am very unhappy; and Proctor thinks I had better tell you what is upon my mind. I owe some money, and I do not see how I can ever pay it, unless you will help me. You know I have owed Proctor sixpence for ginger-beer, this long time; and as Lamb has never paid him his share, Proctor cannot excuse me this debt. Then I owe a boy a shilling, lent me for school-fines; and he never lets me alone about it. Then I was led into betting a shilling on a balloon, and I lost; and so I owe half-a-crown. If you would lend me that sum, sir, I shall be obliged to you for ever, and I shall never forget it.
>
> "Yours respectfully,
>
> "Thomas Holt."

Mr Shaw's man George carried the letter; but he brought back neither letter nor money: only a message that Mr Tooke would call; which put Holt into a great fright, and made Hugh rather uneasy.

There was no occasion for this, however. Mr Tooke came alone into the room where the boys were sitting; and neither Mr nor Mrs Shaw appeared during the whole time of his visit: a thing which was rather odd, but which the boys were very glad of.

When Mr Tooke had told them a little of some new boys expected after the holidays, he said:

"Well, now, Holt, let us see what can be done about your affairs."

Holt looked uneasy; for it seemed as if Mr Tooke was not going to lend him the money,—or to give it, which was what he had hoped, while using the word "lend."

"I am glad you asked me," continued Mr Tooke; "for people, whether they be men or boys, can usually retrieve their affairs when they have resolution to face their difficulties. There is no occasion to say anything about how you got into debt. We must consider how you are to get out of it."

"That is very kind indeed!" exclaimed Holt.

"As to my lending you half-a-crown," continued Mr Tooke, "that would not be helping you out of debt; for if you had had any prospect of being able to pay half-a-crown, you would not have needed to apply to me at all."

Holt sighed. Mr Tooke went on.

"I cannot give you the money. I have less to give away than I should like to have, for the sake of the poor people round us. I cannot pay for a bet and school-fines while the children of our neighbours want clothes and fire."

"No, sir, certainly," said both the boys.

"What do people do, all the world over, when they want money?" asked Mr Tooke. Holt looked puzzled. Hugh smiled. Holt was hesitating whether to guess that they put into the lottery, or dig for treasure, or borrow from their friends, or what. Having always till lately lived in India, where Europeans are rather lazy, and life altogether is very languid, he did not see, as Hugh did, what Mr Tooke could mean.

"When men come begging to our doors," said Mr Tooke, "what is the first question we ask them?"

Holt still looked puzzled, and Hugh laughed, saying,—

"Why, Holt, you must know very well. We ask them whether they cannot get work."

"Work!" cried Holt.

"Yes," said Mr Tooke. "The fathers and uncles of both of you work for what money they have; and so do I; and so does every man among our neighbours who is satisfied with his condition. As far as I see, you must get the money you want in the same way."

"Work!" exclaimed Holt again.

"How is he to get work?" asked Hugh.

"That is where I hope to assist him," replied Mr Tooke. "Are you willing to earn your half-crown, Holt?"

"I don't know how, sir."

"Widow Murray thinks she should have a better chance for a new lodger if her little parlour was fresh papered; but she is too rheumatic to do it herself, and cannot afford to engage a workman. If you like to try, under her directions, I will pay you as your work deserves."

"But, sir, I never papered a room in my life."

"No more had the best paper-hanger in London when he first tried. But if you do not like that work, what do you think of doing some writing for me? Our tables of rules are dirty. If you will make good copies of our rules for all the rooms in which they hang, in the course of the holidays, I will pay you half-a-crown. But the copies must be quite correct, and the writing good. I can offer you one other choice. Our school library wants looking to. If you will put fresh paper covers to all the books that want covering, write the titles on the backs, compare the whole with the catalogue, and arrange them properly on the shelves, I will pay you half-a-crown."

Holt's pleasure in the prospect of being out of debt was swallowed up in the anxiety of undertaking anything so new to him as work out of school. Hugh hurried him on to a decision.

"Do choose the papering," urged Hugh. "I can help you in that, I do believe. I can walk that little way, to widow Murray's; and I can paste the paper. Widow Murray will show you how to do it; and it is very easy, if you once learn to join the pattern. I found that, when I helped to paper the nursery closet at home."

"It is an easy pattern to join," said Mr Tooke.

"There now! And that is the chief thing. If you do the library books, I cannot help you, you know. And remember, you will have two miles to walk each way; four miles a-day in addition to the work."

"He can sleep at Crofton, if he likes," said Mr Tooke.

"That would be a queer way of staying at uncle Shaw's," observed Hugh.

"Then there is copying the rules," said Holt. "I might do that here; and you might help me, if you liked."

"Dull work!" exclaimed Hugh. "Think of copying the same rules three or four times over! And then, if you make mistakes, if you do not write clearly, where is your half-crown? I don't mean that I would not help you, but it would be the dullest work of all."

Mr Tooke sat patiently waiting till Holt had made up his mind. He perceived something that never entered Hugh's mind: that Holt's pride was hurt at the notion of doing workman's work. He wrote on a slip of paper these few words, and pushed them across the table to Holt, with a smile:—

"No debtor's hands are clean, however white they be: Who digs and pays his way—the true gentleman is he."

Holt coloured as he read, and immediately said that he chose the papering job. Mr Tooke rose, tossed the slip of paper into the fire, buttoned up his coat, and said that he should let widow Murray know that a workman would wait upon her the next morning, and that she must have her paste and brushes and scissors ready.

"And a pair of steps," said Hugh, with a sigh.

"Steps, of course," replied Mr Tooke. "You will think it a pretty paper, I am sure."

"But, sir, she must quite understand that she is not at all obliged to us,—that is, to me," said Holt.

"Certainly. You will tell her so yourself, of course."

Here again Holt's pride was hurt; but the thought of being out of Meredith's power sustained him.

When Mr Tooke was gone, Hugh said to his companion,—

"I do not want you to tell me what Mr Tooke wrote on that paper that he burned. I only want to know whether he asked you to choose so as to indulge me."

"You! O no! There was not a word about you."

"O! Very well!" replied Hugh, not sure whether he was pleased or not.

The next morning was so fine that there was no difficulty about Hugh's walking the short distance to the widow Murray's; and there, for three mornings, did the boys work diligently, till the room was papered, and two cupboards into the bargain. Holt liked it very well, except for two things:—that Hugh was sure he could have done some difficult corners better than Holt had done them, if he could but have stood upon the steps; and that widow Murray did so persist in thanking him, that he had to tell her several times over that she was not obliged to him at all, because he was to be paid for the job.

Mr Tooke came to see the work when it was done, and returned to Mr Shaw's with the boys, in order to pay Holt his half-crown immediately, and yet so that the widow should not see. Hugh's eye followed Mr Tooke's hand as it went a second time into his pocket; and he was conscious of some sort of hope that he might be paid something too. When no more silver came forth, he felt aware that he ought not to have dreamed of any reward for the help he had freely offered to his companion: and he asked himself whether his schoolfellows were altogether wrong in thinking him too fond of money; and whether he was altogether right in having said that it was justice that he cared for, and not money, when he had pressed his debtor hard. However this might be, he was very glad to receive his sixpence from Holt. As he put it in his inner pocket, he observed that this would be all the money he should have in the world when he should have spent his five shillings in fairings for home.

Holt made no answer. He had nothing to spend in the fair; still less, anything left over. But he remembered that he was out of debt,—that Meredith, would twit him no more,—and he began to whistle, so light-hearted, that no amount of money could have made him happier. He only left off whistling to thank Hugh earnestly for having persuaded him to open his heart to Mr Tooke.

Chapter Thirteen.

Tripping.

When the day came for returning to Crofton, Hugh would have left his crutches behind at his uncle's, so much did he prefer walking with the little light stick-leg he had been practising with for a fortnight. But his aunt shook her head at this, and ordered the crutches into the gig. He still walked slowly and cautiously, and soon grew tired: and she thought he might find it a relief at times to hop about on his crutches. They were hidden under the bed, however, immediately on his arrival; so anxious was Hugh to make the least of his lameness, and look as like other boys as possible, both for Tooke's sake and his own. When the boys had been all assembled for one day, and everybody had seen how little Proctor could walk, the subject seemed to be dropped, and nothing was talked of but the new usher. So Hugh said to himself; and he really thought that he had fully taken his place again as a Crofton boy, and that he should be let off all notice of his infirmity henceforth, and all trials from it, except such as no one but himself need know of. He was even not quite sure whether he should not be a gainer by it on the whole. He remembered Tooke's assurances of protection and friendship; he found Phil very kind and watchful; and Mrs Watson told him privately that he was to be free of the orchard. She showed him the little door through which he might enter at any time, alone, or with one companion. Here he might read, or talk, and get out of sight of play that he could not share. The privilege was to be continued as long as no mischief was done to anything within the orchard. The prospect of the hours, the quiet hours, the bright hours that he should spend here alone with Dale, delighted Hugh: and when he told Dale, Dale liked the prospect too; and they went together, at the earliest opportunity, to survey their new domain, and plan where they would sit in spring, and how they would lie on the grass in summer, and be closer and closer friends for ever.

Holt was encouraged to hope that he should have his turn sometimes; but he saw that, though Hugh cared more for him than before the holidays, he yet loved Dale the best.

While Hugh was still in spirits at the thought that his worst trials were over, and the pleasure of his indulgences to come, he felt very complacent; and he thought he would gratify himself with one more reading of the theme which he had written in the holidays,—the theme which he really believed Mr Tooke might fairly praise,—so great had been the pains he had taken with

the composition, and so neatly was it written out. He searched for it in vain among his books and in his portfolio. Then he got leave to go up to his room, and turn over all his clothes. He did so in vain; and at last he remembered that it was far indeed out of his reach,—in the drawer of his aunt's work-table, where it had lain ever since she had asked him for it, to read to a lady who had visited her.

The themes would certainly be called for the first thing on Mr Tooke's appearance in school, at nine the next morning. The duties of the early morning would leave no one any time to run to Mr Shaw's then. If anybody went, it must be now. The first day was one of little regularity; it was only just beginning so grow dusk; any willing boy might be back before supper; and there was no doubt that leave would be given on such an occasion. So Hugh made his way to the playground as fast as possible, and told his trouble to his best friends there,—to Phil, and Holt, and Dale, and as many as happened to be within hearing.

"Never mind your theme!" said Phil. "Nobody expected you to do one; and you have only to say that you left it behind you."

"It is not that," said Hugh. "I must show up my theme."

"You can't, you know, if you have it not to show," said two or three, who thought this settled the matter.

"But it is there: it is at my uncle's, if any one would go for it," said Hugh, beginning to be agitated.

"Go for it!" exclaimed Phil. "What, in the dark,—this freezing afternoon?"

"It is not near dark; it will not be dark this hour. Anybody might run there and back before supper."

He looked at Dale; but Dale looked another way. For a moment he thought of Tooke's permission to appeal to him when he wanted a friend: but Tooke was not within hearing; and he dismissed the thought of pointing out Tooke to anybody's notice. He turned away as Phil repeated that it was quite certain that there would be no bad consequences from his being unprovided with a theme, which was not one of his regular lessons.

Phil was not quite easy, however: nor were the others who heard; and in a minute they looked round for Hugh. He was

leaning his face upon his arms, against the orchard-wall; and when, with gentle force, they pulled him away, they saw that his face was bathed in tears. He sobbed out,—

"I took such pains with that theme,—all the holidays! And I can't go for it myself."

There were loud exclamations from many against Phil, against one another, and against themselves; and now everybody was eager to go. Phil stopped all who had started off, saying that it was his business; and the next moment, Phil was at Mr Tooke's study-door, asking leave of absence till supper.

"Little Holt has been beforehand with you," said Mr Tooke. "I refused him, however, as he is not so fit as you to be out after dark. Off with you!"

Before Phil returned, it struck Hugh that he had been very selfish; and that it was not a good way of bearing his trial to impose on any one a walk of four miles, to repair a piece of carelessness of his own. Nobody blamed him; but he did not like to look in the faces round him, to see what people thought. When Phil returned, fresh and hungry from the frosty air, and threw down the paper, saying,—

"There is your theme, and my aunt is very sorry," Hugh said,—

"Oh! Phil, and I am so sorry too! I hope you are not very tired."

"Never mind!" replied Phil. "There is your theme."

And with this Hugh was obliged to be satisfied; but it left him exceedingly uncomfortable—sorry for Phil—disappointed in Dale—and much more disappointed in himself. The thought of what Holt had wished to do was the only pleasant part of it; and Hugh worked beside Holt, and talked with him all the evening.

Hugh felt, the next morning, as if he was never to have any pleasure from his themes, though they were the lesson he did best. This one was praised, quite as much as the former one: and he did not this time tell anybody what Mr Tooke had said about it: but the pleasure was spoiled by the recollection that his brother had run four miles on account of it, and that he himself must have appeared to others more selfish than he thought them. He burned his theme, that he might the more easily forget all about it; and the moment after he had done so, Phil said he should have kept it, as other boys did theirs, for his parents to see.

Mr Crabbe was just such a master as it was good for the little boys to be under. He did not punish capriciously, nor terrify them by anything worse than his strictness. Very strict he was; and he thus caused them some fear every day: for Holt was backward, and not very clever: and Hugh was still much less able to learn than most other boys. But all felt that Mr Crabbe was not unreasonable, and they always knew exactly how much to be afraid of. Whether he had inquired, or been told, the story of Hugh's lameness, they did not know. He said nothing about it, except just asking Hugh whether it tired him to stand up in class, saying that he might sit at the top or bottom of the class, instead of taking places, if he chose. Hugh did find it rather fatiguing at first: but he did not like to take advantage of Mr Crabbe's offer, because it so happened that he was almost always at the bottom of his classes: and to have withdrawn from the contest would have looked like a trick to hide the shame, and might have caused him to be set down as a dunce who never could rise. He thanked Mr Crabbe, and said that if he should rise in his classes, and keep a good place for some time, he thought he should be glad to sit, instead of standing; but meantime he had rather be tired. Then the feeling of fatigue went off before he rose, or saw any chance of rising.

This inability to do his lessons so well as other boys was a deep and lasting grief to Hugh. Though he had in reality improved much since he came to Crofton, and was now and then cheered by some proof of this, his general inferiority in this respect was such as to mortify him every day of his life, and sometimes to throw him almost into despair. He saw that everybody pitied him for the loss of his foot, but not for this other trouble, while he felt this to be rather the worst of the two; and all the more because he was not sure himself whether or not he could help it, as every one else seemed certain that he might. When he said his prayer in his bed, he earnestly entreated that he might be able to bear the one trouble, and be delivered from the other; and when, as the spring came on, he was found by one friend or another lying on the grass with his face hidden, he was often praying with tears for help in doing this duty, when he was thought to be grieving that he could not play at leaping or foot-ball, like other boys. And yet, the very next evening, when the whole school were busy over their books, and there was nothing to interfere with his work, he would pore over his lesson without taking in half the sense, while his fancy was straying everywhere but where it ought;—perhaps to little Harry, or the Temple Gardens at home, or to Cape Horn, or Japan—some way farther off still. It did not often happen now, as formerly, that he forgot before morning a lesson well learned over-night. He

was aware that now everything depended on whether he was once sure of his lesson; but the difficulty was in once being sure of it.

Finding Phil's kindness continue through the first weeks and months of the half-year, Hugh took courage at last to open his mind pretty freely to his brother, offering to do anything in the world for Phil, if he would only hear him his lessons every evening till he could say them perfect. Phil was going to plead that he had no time, when Hugh popped out—

"The thing is that it does not help me to say them to just anybody. Saying them to somebody that I am afraid of is what I want."

"Why, you are not afraid of me?" said Phil. "Yes I am—rather."

"What for?"

"Oh, because you are older;—and you are so much more of a Crofton boy than I am—and you are very strict—and altogether—"

"Yes, you will find me pretty strict, I can tell you," said Phil, unable to restrain a complacent smile on finding that somebody was afraid of him. "Well, we must see what we can do. I will hear you to-night, at any rate."

Between his feeling of kindness and the gratification of his vanity, Phil found himself able to hear his brother's lessons every evening. He was certainly very strict, and was not sparing of such pushes, joggings, and ridicule as were necessary to keep Hugh up to his work. These were very provoking sometimes; but Hugh tried to bear them for the sake of the gain. Whenever Phil would condescend to explain, in fresh words, the sense of what Hugh had to learn, he saved trouble to both, and the lesson went off quickly and easily: but sometimes he would not explain anything, and soon went away in impatience, leaving Hugh in the midst of his perplexities. There was a chance, on such occasions, that Firth might be at leisure, or Dale able to help: so that, one way and another, Hugh found his affairs improving as the spring advanced; and he began to lose his anxiety, and to gain credit with the usher. He also now and then won a place in his classes.

Towards the end of May, when the trees were full of leaf, and the evenings sunny, and the open air delicious, quite up to bedtime, Phil became persuaded, very suddenly, that Hugh

could get on by himself now; that it was not fair that he should be helped; and that it was even hurtful to him to rely on any one but himself. If Phil had acted gradually upon this conviction, withdrawing his help by degrees, it might have been all very well: but he refused at once and decidedly to have anything more to do with Hugh's lessons, as he was quite old and forward enough now to do them by himself. This announcement threw his brother into a state of consternation not at all favourable to learning; and the next morning Hugh made several blunders. He did the same every day that week; was every afternoon detained from play to learn his lessons again; and on the Saturday morning (repetition day) he lost all the places he had gained, and left off at the bottom of every class.

What could Mr Crabbe suppose but that a sudden fit of idleness was the cause of this falling back? It appeared so to him, and to the whole school; and poor Hugh felt as if there was scorn in every eye that looked upon his disgrace. He thought there could not be a boy in the school who did not see or hear that he was at the bottom of every class.

Mr Crabbe always desired to be just: and he now gave Hugh the opportunity of explaining, if he had anything to say. He remained in the school-room after the boys had left it, and asked Hugh a question or two. But Hugh sobbed and cried so bitterly that he could not speak so as to be understood; and he did not wish to explain, feeling that he was much obliged to Phil for his former help, and that he ought not to complain to any master of its being now withdrawn. So Mr Crabbe could only hope that next week would show a great difference, and advise him to go out with the rest this afternoon, to refresh himself for a new effort.

Hugh did not know whether he had not rather have been desired to stay at home than go out among so many who considered him disgraced. It really was hard (though Holt stood by him, and Dale was his companion as usual) to bear the glances he saw, and the words that came to his ear. Some boys looked to see how red his eyes were: some were surprised to see him abroad, and hinted a favouritism because he was not shut up in the school-room. Some asked whether he could say his alphabet yet; and others whether he could spell "dunce." The most cruel thing of all was to see Tooke in particularly high spirits. He kept away from Hugh; but Hugh's eye followed him from afar, and saw that he capered and laughed, and was gayer than at any time this half-year. Hugh saw into his heart (or thought he did) as plain as he saw to the bottom of the clear

stream in the meadows, to which they were bound for their afternoon's sport.

"I know what Tooke is feeling," thought he. "He is pleased to see me lowered, as long as it is not his doing. He is sorry to see me suffer by my lameness; because that hurts his conscience: but he is pleased to see me wrong and disgraced, because that relieves him of the feeling of being obliged to me. If I were now to put him in mind of his promise, to stand by me, and protect me— I declare I will— it will stop his wicked joy— it will make him remember his duty."

Dale wondered to see Hugh start off, as fast as he could go, to overtake the foremost boys, who were just entering the meadow, and spreading themselves over it. Tooke could, alas! Like everybody else, go faster than Hugh; and there was no catching him, though he did not seem to see that anybody wanted him. Neither could he be made to hear, though Hugh called him as loud as he could shout. Holt was so sorry to see Hugh hot and agitated, that he made no objection to going after Tooke, though he was pretty sure Tooke would be angry with him. Holt could run as fast as anybody, and he soon caught the boy he was pursuing, and told him that little Proctor wanted him very much indeed, that very moment. Tooke sent him about his business, saying that he could not come; and then immediately proposed brook-leaping for their sport, leading the way himself over a place so wide that no lesser boy, however nimble, could follow. Holt came running back, shaking his head, and showing that his errand was in vain. Tooke was so full of play that he could think of nothing else; which was a shame.

"Ah! And you little know," thought Hugh, "how deep a shame it is."

With a swelling heart he turned away, and went towards the bank of the broader stream which ran through the meadows. Dale was with him in a moment,—very sorry for him, because everybody else was at brook-leaping,—the sport that Hugh had loved so well last autumn. Dale passed his arm round Hugh's neck, and asked where they should sit and tell stories,—where they could best hide themselves, so that nobody should come and tease them. Hugh wished to thank his friend for this; but he could not speak directly. They found a pleasant place among the flowering reeds on the bank, where they thought nobody would see them; and having given Holt to understand that they did not want him, they settled themselves for their favourite amusement of story-telling.

But Hugh's heart was too full and too sick for even his favourite amusement; and Dale was perhaps too sorry for him to be the most judicious companion he could have at such a time. Dale agreed that the boys were hard and careless; and he added that it was particularly shameful to bring up a boy's other faults when he was in disgrace for one. In the warmth of his zeal, he told how one boy had been laughing at Hugh's conceit about his themes, when he had shown to-day that he could not go half through his syntax; and how he had heard another say that all that did not signify half so much as his being mean about money. Between Hugh's eagerness to hear, and Dale's sympathy, five minutes were not over before Hugh had heard every charge that could be brought against his character, and knew that they were all circulating this very afternoon. In his agony of mind he declared that everybody at Crofton hated him,—that he could never hold up his head there,—that he would ask to be sent home by the coach, and never come near Crofton again.

Dale now began to be frightened, and wished he had not said so much. He tried to make light of it; but Hugh seemed disposed to do something decided;—to go to his uncle Shaw's at least, if he could not get home. Dale earnestly protested, against any such idea, and put him in mind how he was respected by everybody for his bravery about the loss of his foot.

"Respected?"

"Not a bit of it!" cried Hugh. "They none of them remember: they don't care a bit about it."

Dale was sure they did.

"I tell you they don't. I know they don't. I know it for certain; and I will tell you how I know. There is the very boy that did it,—the very boy that pulled me from the wall— O! If you knew who it was, you *would* say it was a shame!"

Dale involuntarily sat up, and looked back, over the top of the reeds, at the boys who were brook-leaping.

"Would you like to know who it was that did it, Dale?"

"Yes, if you like to tell; but— And if he treats you ill, after the way you used him, he cannot expect you should consider him so— Besides, I am your best friend; and I always tell you everything!"

"Yes, that you do. And he has treated me so shamefully to-day! And I have nobody to speak to that knows. You will promise never—never to tell anybody as long as you live."

"To be sure," said Dale.

"And you won't tell anybody that I have told you."

"To be sure not."

"Well, then—"

Here there was a rustling among the reeds which startled them both, with a sort of guilty feeling. It was Holt, quite out of breath.

"I don't want to interrupt you," said he, "and I know you wish I would not come; but the others made me come. The biggest boys lay that the second-size can't jump the brook at the willow-stump; and the second-size boys want Dale to try. They made me come. I could not help it."

Hugh looked at Dale, with eyes which said, as plainly as eyes could speak, "You will not go—you will not leave me at such a moment?"

But Dale was not looking at his face, but at the clusters of boys beside the brook. He said—

"You will not mind my going, just for one leap. It will hardly take a minute. I shall not stay for a game. But I must have just one leap."

And he was off. Holt looked after him, and then towards Hugh, hesitating whether to go or stay. Hugh took no notice of him: so he went slowly away, and Hugh was left alone.

He was in an extreme perturbation. At the first moment, he was beyond measure hurt with Dale. He did not think his best friend would have so reminded him of his infirmity, and of his being a restraint on his companions. He did not think any friend could have left him at such a moment. Then it occurred to him,—

"What, then, am I? If Dale was selfish, what was I? I was just going to tell what would have pointed out Tooke to him for life. I know as well as can be that it was all accident his pulling me off the wall; and yet I was going to bring it up against him; and for the very reason why I should not,—because he has not

behaved well to me. I was just going to spoil the only good thing I ever did for anybody in my life. But it is spoiled—completely spoiled. I shall never be able to trust myself again. It is all by mere accident that it is not all over now. If Holt had not come that very instant, my secret would have been out, and I could never have got it back again! I could never have looked Tooke in the face any more. I don't know that I can now; for I am as wicked as if I had told."

Dale came back presently, fanning himself with his cap. As he plunged into the reeds, and threw himself down beside Hugh, he cried,—

"I did it! I took the leap, and came off with my shoe-soles as dry as a crust. Ah! They are wet now; but that is with another leap I took for sport. I told you I should not be long gone. Now for it! Who did it?"

"I am not going to tell you, Dale,—not now, nor ever."

"Why, that is too bad! I am sure I stay beside you often enough, when the others are playing: you need not grudge me this one leap,—when the boys sent for me, too."

"It is not that, Dale. You are very kind always in staying beside me; and I do not wish that you should give up play for my sake half so much as you do. But I was very, very wrong in meaning to tell you that secret. I should have been miserable by this time if I had."

"But you promised. You must keep your promise. What would all the boys say, if I told them you had broken your promise?"

"If they knew what it was about, they would despise me for ever meaning to tell—not for stopping short in time. That was only accident, however. But my secret is my own still."

Dale's curiosity was so strong that Hugh saw how dangerous it was to have tantalised it. He had to remind his friend of Mr Tooke's having put all the boys upon honour not to inquire on this subject. This brought Dale to himself; and he promised never again to urge Hugh, or encourage his speaking of the matter at all. They then went to story-telling; but it would not do to-day. Hugh could not attend; and Dale could not invent, while there was no sympathy in his hearer. He was presently released, for it struck Hugh that he should like to write to his mother this very afternoon. His heart was heavy, and he

wanted to tell her what was in it. Mr Crabbe gave him leave to go home; and Dale was in time for plenty more play.

Hugh had the great school-room all to himself; and as the window before his desk was open, he had the pleasure of the fresh air, and the smell of the blossoms from the orchard, and the sound of the waving of the tall trees in the wind, and the cawing of the rooks as the trees waved. These things all made him enjoy scribbling away to his mother, as well as finding his mind grow easier as he went on. Besides, he had not to care for the writing; for he had met Mr Tooke by the church, and had got his leave to send his letter without anybody's looking at it, as he had something very particular to say. He wrote,—

"Dear Mother,—

"It is Saturday afternoon, and I have come home from the meadows before the rest, to tell you something that has made me very uneasy. If I had told anybody in the world who pulled me off the wall, it should and would have been you,—that night after it happened: and I am afraid I should have told you, if you had not prevented it: for I find I am not to be trusted when I am talking with anybody I love very much. I have not told yet: but I should have told Dale if Holt had not run up at the very moment. It makes me very unhappy,—almost as much as if I had let it out: for how do I know but that I may tell a hundred times over in my life, if I could forget so soon? I shall be afraid of loving anybody very much, and talking with them alone, as long as I live. I never felt the least afraid of telling till to-day; and you cannot think how unhappy it makes me. And then, the thing that provoked me to tell was that boy's being surly to me, and glad that I was in disgrace this morning, for doing my lessons badly all this week,—the very thing that should have made me particularly careful how I behaved to him: for his pulling me off the wall was only accident, after all. Everything has gone wrong to-day; and I am very unhappy, and I feel as if I should never be sure of anything again; and so I write to you. You told me you expected me not to fail; and you see I have; and the next thing is that I must tell you of it.

"Your affectionate son,

"Hugh Proctor.

"PS. Phil has been very kind about my lessons, till this week (*interlined*), when he has been very busy.

"PS. If you should answer this, please put 'private' outside, or at the top; and then Mr Tooke will not read it, nor anybody. But I know you are very busy always; so I do not quite expect an answer."

When the letter was finished and closed, Hugh felt a good deal relieved: but still not happy. He had opened his heart to the best friend he had in this world: but he still felt grievously humbled for the present, and alarmed for the future. Then he remembered that he might seek comfort from a better Friend still; and that He who had sent him his trial could and would help him to bear it with honour as well as with patience. As he thought of this, he saw that the boys were trooping home, along the road, and he slipped out, and into the orchard, where he knew he might be alone with his best Friend. He stayed there till the supper-bell rang; and when he came in, it was with a cheerful face. He was as merry as anybody at supper: and afterwards he found his lessons more easy to him than usual. The truth was that his mind was roused by the conflicts of the day. He said his lessons to Phil (who found time to-night to hear him), without missing a word. When he went to bed, he had several pleasant thoughts. His secret was still his own (though by no merit of his); to-morrow was Sunday,—likely to be a bright, sweet May Sunday,—his lessons were quite ready for Monday; and possibly there might be a letter from his mother in the course of the week.

Mrs Proctor was in the midst of her Monday morning's business (and Monday morning was the busiest of the week), when she received Hugh's letter. Yet she found time to answer it by the very next post. When her letter was handed to Hugh, with the seal unbroken, because 'private' was written large on the outside, we thought she was the kindest mother that ever was, to have written so soon, and to have minded all his wishes. Her letter was,—

"Dear Hugh,

"There was nothing in your letter to surprise me at all; for I believe, if all our hearts were known, it would be found that we have every one been saved from doing wrong by what we call accident. The very best people say this of themselves, in their thanksgivings to God, and their confessions to one another. Though you were very unhappy on

Saturday, I am not sorry that these things have happened, as I think you will be the safer and the wiser for them. You say you never till then felt the least afraid of telling. Now you know the danger; and that is a good thing. I think you will never again see that boy (whoever he may be), without being put upon your guard. Still, we are all sadly forgetful about our duty; and, if I were you, I would use every precaution against such a danger as you have escaped,—it makes me tremble to think how narrowly. If I were you, I would engage any friend I should become intimate with, the whole time of being at school, and perhaps afterwards, never to say a word about the accident,—or, at least, about how it happened. Another way is to tell me your mind, as you have now; for you may be sure that it is my wish that you should keep your secret, and that I shall always be glad to help you to do it.

"But, my dear boy, I can do but little, in comparison with the best Friend you have. He can help you without waiting for your confidence,—even at the very instant when you are tempted. It is He who sends these very accidents (as we call them) by which you have now been saved. Have you thanked Him for saving you this time? And will you not trust in His help henceforward; instead of supposing yourself safe, as you now find you are not? If you use His strength, I feel that you will not fail. If you trust your own intentions alone, I shall never feel sure of you for a single hour, nor be certain that the companion you love best may not be your worst enemy, in breaking down your self-command. But, as you say you were very unhappy on Saturday, I have no doubt you did go for comfort to the right Friend, and that you were happier on Sunday.

"Your sisters do not know that I am writing, as I consider your letter a secret from everybody but your father, who sends his love. You need not show this to Phil; but you can give him our love. Your sisters are counting the days to the holidays; and so are some older members of the family. As for Harry, he shouts for you from the yard every day, and seems to think that every shout will bring nearer the happy time when Phil and you will come home.

"Your affectionate mother,

"Jane Proctor."

Hugh was, of course, very glad of this letter. And he was glad of something else;—that he had done the very things his mother had advised. He had engaged Dale not to tempt him on this subject any more. He had opened his heart to his mother, and obtained her help; and he had sought a better assistance, and a a higher comfort still. It was so delightful to have such a letter as this,—to be so understood and aided, that he determined to tell his mother all his concerns, as long as he lived. When, in the course of the holidays, he told her so, she smiled, and said she supposed he meant as long as *she* lived; for she was likely to die long before he did. Hugh could not deny this; but he never liked to think about it:—he always drove away the thought; though he knew, as his mother said, that this was rather cowardly, and that the wisest and most loving people in the world remember the most constantly and cheerfully that friends must be parted for a while, before they can live together for ever.

Chapter Fourteen.

Holt and his Help.

Nothing more was heard by Hugh, or any one else, of Lamb's debt. The creditor himself chose to say nothing about it, so much was he annoyed at being considered fond of money; but he was sure that Lamb's pockets were filled, from time to time, as he was seen eating good things in by-corners when everybody knew that his credit with his companions, and with all the neighbouring tradespeople, was exhausted. It was surprising that anybody could care so much for a shilling's worth of tarts or fruit as to be at the trouble of any concealment, or of constantly getting out of Hugh's way, rather than pay, and have done with it. When Lamb was seen munching or skulking, Firth sometimes asked Hugh whether he had got justice yet in that quarter: and then Hugh laughed; and Firth saw that he had gained something quite as good,—a power of doing without it good-humouredly, from those who were so unhappy as not to understand or care for justice.

In one respect, however, Hugh was still within Lamb's power. When Lamb was not skulking, he was much given to boasting;

and his boasts were chiefly about what a great man he was to be in India. He was really destined for India; and his own opinion was that he should have a fine life of it there, riding on an elephant, with a score of servants always about him, spending all his mornings in shooting, and all his evenings at dinners and balls. Hugh did not care about the servants, sport, or dissipation; and he did not see why any one should cross the globe to enjoy things like these, which might be had at home. But it did make him sigh to think that a lazy and ignorant boy should be destined to live among those mountains, and that tropical verdure of which he had read,—to see the cave-temples, the tanks, the prodigious rivers, and the natives and their ways, of which his imagination was full, while he must stay at home, and see nothing beyond London, as long as he lived. He did not grudge Holt his prospect of going to India; for Holt was an improved and improving boy, and had, moreover, a father there whom he loved very much: but Hugh could never hear Lamb's talk about India without being ready to cry.

"Do you think," he said to Holt, "that all this is true?"

"It is true that he is to go to India. His father has interest to get him out. But I do not believe he will like it so well as he thinks. At least, I know that my father has to work pretty hard,—harder than Lamb ever worked, or ever will work."

"O dear! I wish I could go and do the work; and I would send all the money home to him (except just enough to live upon), and then he might go to dinners and balls in London, as much as he liked, and I could see the Hindoos and the cave-temples."

"That is another mistake of Lamb's,—about the quantity of money," said Holt. "I do not believe anybody in India is so rich as he pretends, if they work ever so hard. I know my father works as hard as anybody, and he is not rich; and I know the same of several of his friends. So it is hardly likely that such a lazy dunce as Lamb should be rich, unless he has a fortune here at home; and if he had that, I do not believe he would take the trouble of going so far, to suffer by the heat."

"I should not mind the heat," sighed Hugh, "if I could go. You must write to me, Holt, all about India. Write me the longest letters in the world; and tell me everything you can think of about the natives, and Juggernaut's Car."

"That I will, if you like. But I am afraid that would only make you long the more to go,—like reading Voyages and Travels.

How I do wish, though, that you were going with me by-and-by, as you let me go home with you these holidays!”

It was really true that Holt was going to London these holidays. He was not slow to acknowledge that Hugh’s example had put into him some of the spirit that he had wanted when he came to Crofton, languid, indolent, and somewhat spoiled, as little boys from India are apt to be; and Hugh, for his part, saw now that he had been impatient and unkind towards Holt, and had left him forlorn, after having given him hopes that they were to be friends and companions. They were gradually becoming real friends now; and the faster, because Holt was so humble as not to be jealous of Hugh’s still liking Dale best. Holt was satisfied to be liked best when Dale could not be had; and as this was the case in the Midsummer holidays, he was grateful to be allowed to spend them with the Proctors.

Hugh was so thankful for his father’s kindness in giving him a companion of his own age, and so pleased to show Holt little Harry, and the leads, and the river, and his shelf of books, and Covent Garden Market, and other wonders of London, that any unpleasant feelings that the boys had ever entertained towards each other were quite forgotten, and they grew more intimate every day. It touched Hugh’s heart to see how sorry Holt was for every little trial that befel him, on coming home, altered as he was. Agnes herself did not turn red oftener, or watch more closely to help him than Holt did. Hugh himself had to tell him not to mind when he saw the shop-boy watching his way of walking, or little Harry trying to limp like him, or Susan pretending to find fault with him, as she used to do, as an excuse for brushing away her tears. Holt was one of the first to find out that Hugh liked to be sent errands about the house, or in the neighbourhood; and it was he who convinced the family of it, though at first they could not understand or believe it at all. When they saw, however, that Hugh, who used to like that his sisters should wait upon him, and to be very slow in moving from his book, even at his mother’s desire, now went up-stairs and down-stairs for everybody, and tried to be more independent in his habits than any one else, they began to think that Holt knew Hugh’s mind better than even they, and to respect and love him accordingly.

There was another proof of friendship given by Holt, more difficult by far; and in giving it, he showed that he really had learned courage and spirit from Hugh, or in some other way. He saw that his friend was now and then apt to do what most people who have an infirmity are prone to,—to make use of his

privation to obtain indulgences for himself, or as an excuse for wrong feelings; and when Holt could not help seeing this, he resolutely told his friend of it. No one else but Mrs Proctor would see or speak the truth on such occasions; and when his mother was not by, Hugh would often have done selfish things unchecked, if it had not been for Holt. His father pitied him so deeply, that he joked even about Hugh's faults, rather than give him present pain. Phil thought he had enough to bear at Crofton, end that everybody should let him alone in the holidays. His sisters humoured him in everything: so that if it had not been for Holt, Hugh might have had more trouble with his faults than ever, on going back to Crofton.

"Do you really and truly wish not to fail, as you say, Hugh?" asked Holt.

"To be sure."

"Well, then, do try not to be cross."

"I am not cross."

"I know you think it is low spirits. I am not quite sure of that: but if it is, would not it be braver not to be low in spirits?"

Hugh muttered that that was fine talking for people that did not know.

"That is true, I dare say; and I do not believe I should be half as brave as you, but I *should* like to see you quite brave."

"It is a pretty thing for you to lecture me, when I got down those books on purpose for you,—those Voyages and Travels. And how can I look at those same books, now and not—"

Hugh could not go on, and he turned away his head.

"Was it for me?" exclaimed Holt, in great concern. "Then I am very sorry. I will carry them to Mrs Proctor, and ask her to put them quite away till we are gone back to Crofton."

"No, no. Don't do that. I want them," said Hugh, finding now that he had not fetched them down entirely on Holt's account. But Holt took him at his word, and carried the books away, and succeeded in persuading Hugh that it was better not to look at volumes which he really almost knew by heart, and every crease, stain, and dog's-ear of which brought up fresh in his mind his old visions of foreign travel and adventure. Then, Holt

never encouraged any conversation about the accident with Susan, or with Mr Blake, when they were in the shop; and he never pretended to see that Hugh's lameness was any reason why he should have the best of their places in the Haymarket Theatre (where they went once), or be the chief person when they capped verses or played other games round the table, in the evenings at home. The next time Hugh was in his right mood, he was sure to feel obliged to Holt; and he sometimes said so.

"I consider you a real friend to Hugh," said Mrs Proctor, one day, when they three were together. "I have dreaded seeing my boy capable only of a short effort of courage;—bearing pain of body and mind well while everybody was sorry for him, and ready to praise him; and then failing in the long trial afterwards. When other people are leaving off being sorry for him, you continue your concern for him, and still remind him not to fail."

"Would not it be a pity, ma'am," said Holt, earnestly, "would it not be a pity for him to fail when he bore everything so well at first, and when he helped me so that I don't know what I should have done without him? He made me write to Mr Tooke, and so got me out of debt; and a hundred times, I am sure, the thought of him and his secret has put spirit into me. It would be a pity if he should fail without knowing it, for want of somebody to put him in mind. He might so easily think he was bearing it all well, as long as he could talk about his foot, and make a joke of being lame, when, all the while, he might be losing his temper in other ways."

"Why, how true that is!" exclaimed Hugh. "I was going to ask if I was ever cross about being lame: but I know I am about other things, because I am worried about that, sometimes."

"It is so easy to put you in mind," continued Holt; "and we shall all be so glad if you are brave to the very end—"

"I will," said Hugh. "Only do you go on to put me in mind—"

"And *you* will grow more and more brave, too," observed Mrs Proctor to Holt.

Holt sighed; for he thought it would take a great deal of practice yet to make him a brave boy. Other people thought he was getting on very fast.

Chapter Fifteen.

Conclusion.

The longer these two boys were together, the more they wished they could spend their lives side by side; or, at least, not be separated by half the globe. Just before the Christmas holidays, some news arrived which startled them so much that they could hardly speak to one another about it for some hours. There was a deep feeling in their hearts which disposed them to speak alone to the Ruler of their lives, before they could even rejoice with one another. When they meditated upon it, they saw that the event had come about naturally enough; but it so exactly met the strongest desire they had in the world, that if a miracle had happened before their eyes, they could not have been more struck.

Holt's father wrote a letter to Mr Proctor, which reached its destination through Mr Tooke's hands; and Mr Tooke was consulted in the whole matter, and requested by Mr Proctor to tell the two boys and Phil all about it. These three were therefore called into Mr Tooke's study one day, to hear some news.

The letters which Mr Tooke read were about Hugh. Mr Holt explained that his son's best years were to be spent, like his own, in India; that his own experience had made him extremely anxious that his son should be associated with companions whom he could respect and love; and that he had long resolved to use such interest as he had in bringing out only such a youth, or youths, as he could wish his son to associate with. He mentioned that he was aware that one lad now at Crofton was destined for India—

"That is Lamb," whispered the boys to each other.

But that he did not hear of any friendship formed, or likely to be formed with advantage between his son and this young gentleman.

"No, indeed!" muttered Holt.

There was one boy, however, Mr Holt went on to say, to whom his son seemed to be attached, and concerning whom he had related circumstances which inspired a strong interest, and which seemed to afford an expectation of an upright manhood following a gallant youth.

Here all the boys reddened, and Hugh looked hard at the carpet.

This boy had evidently a strong inclination for travel and adventure; and though his lameness put military or naval service out of the question, it might not unfit him for civil service in India. If Mr Tooke could give such a report of his health, industry, and capability as should warrant his being offered an appointment, and if his parents were willing so to dispose of him, Mr Holt was anxious to make arrangements for the education of the boys proceeding together, in order to their being companions in their voyage and subsequent employments. And then followed some account of what these arrangements were to be.

"Now, Proctor," said Mr Tooke to the breathless Hugh, "you must consider what you have to say to this. Your parents are willing to agree if you are. But if," he continued, with a kind smile, "it would make you very unhappy to go to India, no one will force your inclinations."

"Oh, sir," said Hugh, "I will work very hard,—I will work as hard as ever I can, if I may go."

"Well: you may go, you see, if you will work hard. You can consider it quietly, or talk it over with your brother and Holt; and to-morrow you are to dine at your uncle's, where you will meet your father; and he and you will settle what to write to Mr Holt, by the next ship."

"And you, sir," said Phil, anxiously—"Mr Holt asks your opinion."

"My opinion is that your brother can be what he pleases. He wants some inducement to pursue his learning more strenuously than he has done yet—"

"I will, sir. I will," indeed, cried Hugh.

"I believe you will. Such a prospect as this will be an inducement, if anything can. You are, on the whole, a brave boy; and brave boys are not apt to be ungrateful to God or man; and I am sure you think it would be ungrateful, both to God and man, to refuse to do your best in the situation which gratifies the first wish of your heart."

Hugh could not say another word. He made his lowest bow, and went straight to his desk. As the first fruits of his gratitude, he

learned his lessons thoroughly well that night; much as he would have liked to spend the time in dreaming.

His father and he had no difficulty in settling what to write to Mr Holt; and very merry were they together when the business was done. In a day or two, when Hugh had had time to think, he began to be glad on Tooke's account; and he found an opportunity of saying to him one day,—

"I never should have gone to India if I had not lost my foot; and I think it is well worth while losing my foot to go to India."

"Do you really? Or do you say it because—"

"I think so really." And then he went off into such a description as convinced Tooke that he was in earnest, though it was to be feared that he would be disappointed by experience. But then again, Mr Tooke was heard to say that one chief requisite for success and enjoyment in foreign service of any kind was a strong inclination for it. So Tooke was consoled, and easier in mind than for a whole year past.

Hugh was able to keep his promise of working hard. Both at Crofton and at the India College, where his education was finished, he studied well and successfully; and when he set sail with his companion, it was with a heart free from all cares but one. Parting from his family was certainly a great grief; and he could not forget the last tone he had heard from Agnes. But this was his only sorrow. He was, at last, on the wide sea, and going to Asia. Holt was his dear friend. He had left none but well-wishers behind. His secret was his own; (though, indeed, he scarcely remembered that he had any secret;) and he could not but be conscious that he went out well prepared for honourable duty.

The End.